BLINDFOLD

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By
ORRICK JOHNS

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TO MY
FATHER
GEORGE S. JOHNS,
IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF UNFAILING SYMPATHY

BLINDFOLD

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I

Ellen Sydney's first garden in the Meadowburn's new American home had made a fair beginning. She was at work one afternoon bending over the bed of sweet peas, hooking the baby tendrils to the wire mesh of the frame, with an occasional pat of the soft dark earth beneath—the earth which Bennet, the youngest of the family, had brought by the basketful from a distance, to enrich the yellow clay that filled in the property.

School was just out and as she worked Bennet banged into the hall, threw down his books and rushed forth again with a shout to join his comrades up the street. They were building a "switch-back railway" from the second story rear window of a neighbour's house. She could just glimpse the murderous rickety scaffolding of it through the small leaves of the alley poplars.

Fastening up the last of the tendrils to the wire, Ellen heard Mrs. Osprey's shrill voice calling from quite half a block away to one of the Osprey boys. She could not restrain a smile at the familiar summons.

"Poor woman," thought she, "they do worry her." But she would no more have thought of pitying Mrs. Osprey actually, than of feeling sorry for Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, whom many years in Canada had taught her to believe next to the angels themselves.

As she turned from the garden she heard a still more familiar voice and Potter Osprey came through the gate.

"Hello, Ellen, mind my coming over?"

"Oh, no! I've got to go in, though. Come in the kitchen, I'm not very busy." She had in fact three easy hours before her, with dinner practically prepared and a little ironing to do before she put the dishes in the stove. Ironing was quite pleasant if you had some one to talk to while you did it.

"Vacation's only six weeks off now," Potter said as they walked up to the house. "Ain't that great! I hate school anyway."

"Ah, Potter, when you are doing so well at it! Milly told me about the debates. She said you were fine in them."

The monthly school debates were a point of pride with him, and he betrayed a momentary embarrassment. He had quite lost himself in the vainglory of winning two of them in succession, or of being on the winning side both times. He had regretted that while they were in progress, especially while he was on his feet, everybody he knew

had not been in the audience. So many people were not. The thing that he feared in talking about them to Ellen was that he would reveal his satisfaction. So Milly had been gossiping about them outside? That pleased him. Milly was in the class below him, which sat in the same room.

He recovered his composure and spoke as though of an ordinary matter.

"Pshaw, the debates ain't really school. They're different. . . . But look, Ellen, all the lots around here are almost forests of weeds in the summer. It's great! You can hide in them, and everything. They get over six feet high. And there's woods only a mile out west there, to swim and camp in. If you have time we can walk there some day."

Ellen's face brightened at the prospect.

"But it gets hot here in the summer," he went on, "awful hot—not like Winnipeg. You won't like that."

"Oh, I've lived in N'Orleans. It's lots hotter there."

"Yes, that's so. That's way down south, ain't it? I always think of you coming from Winnipeg. Bennet talks about it all the time. He's a Britisher all right."

Ellen replied warmly.

"Well, he shouldn't be, even if they were born in Canada. His father says he's going to stand

by this country now, because it gives them a good living and always has. He's going to make them all citizens."

Potter laughed. He was sitting perched up on the kitchen table, his small feet dangling beneath it and his cap in his hand.

"I told Bennet we licked England twice and he got hot under the collar. He's funny. Did you like it better up north?"

"Yes, I guess I did. We used to have good times in Winnipeg. The fellows always in the house, my! It'll be the same here after a while. Those two girls get a crowd coming pretty quick. Only we'll never have snow like in Winnipeg. I did love the snow, such sledding and skating!"

"That's the ticket!" agreed Potter, and added with some disgust, "We hardly had one good skate last winter—soon as it'd freeze it'd thaw! But you should have seen the first winter we were here. Almost two months of ice! This house wasn't here then—hardly any in this row were, and gee, the way the wind used to blow! It changes around here fast. Kirk broke his arm falling through these joistses."

Potter swung down from the table and stood in front of the ironing board, smiling up at the tall woman, his hands in his pockets.

"Say, Ellen, got something to eat? Just anything, you know—I'll tell you why I want it."

Ellen put down her iron on the metal guard

and went into the pantry. She returned with three powdered doughnuts on a plate.

"Here," she said laughing. "You're always eating, Potter Osprey. Your mother told me I was spoiling your appetite for meals."

"Thanks," he said and went on between mouthfuls. "I've been smoking. I thought something to eat would take my breath away."

"Well, if that's what you came here for you can go right back home. You oughtn't smoke—so there!"

Potter, however, did not stir; and for a time there was no sound except the thumping of Ellen's iron on the thickly padded board. She was thumping harder than need be, because she was angry. She was often angry with him. Yet his prolonged visits with her in the kitchen or on the back stoop of a fine afternoon meant much to her. The family already teased her, calling young Osprey "Ellen's pet." Then Tom Meadowburn reminded them that "Ellen always had a pet. Remember Wolly Judson." This sally caused an uproar. Wolly Judson had been a Winnipegian of sixty-eight, a town character, a tottering flirt, who had brought the current gossip regularly to Ellen's door.

Potter heard none of this chaffing, yet in his talks with her he betrayed a small opinion of the Meadowburns, all except his friend Bennet, with whom he sang in the choir. Once he told her in-

dignantly that she worked too hard, she was spoiling the whole family. Why didn't the others do more? Ellen laughed heartily. She did not believe any such thing. It was her lot to work, and keep at it until things were done.

Ellen was neither by birth nor legal adoption a member of the Meadowburn household. She lived there, a fixture; and the principal advantages did accrue to the family. They obtained a willing, strong and tireless servant, modest and well-appearing enough to be treated as a distant relative (and consequently not paid except when chance generosity dictated). She had been with the Meadowburns since she was twelve, learning by heart their various needs so that she could have administered to them in her sleep. She was now twenty-seven, a gaunt figure, black-eyed and above the middle height. The face would have been attractive but for the toughened swarthiness it had acquired, and the cheeks perceptibly sunken by the absence of jaw teeth.

The Meadowburn children had grown up under her care, the two eldest girls being little more than babies at the time the orphan asylum in New Orleans yielded her young and frightened body into the hands of Mrs. Meadowburn. Ellen had found time for those fretful and ill-tempered midgets, in addition to keeping the house spotless, laundering for six and cooking the meals. Mrs. Meadowburn had been left free to nurse a collection of

modern ills, and to dream of her youth as the dark beauty of a northwestern town. Since those days a morose gloom had settled upon her handsome, Indian-like face. Ellen had rarely known her to laugh at all. Even the smile with which she greeted her husband's jokes was wan and half-hearted.

It was to Ellen that Tom Meadowburn looked for the fullest appreciation of his comic genius and his masculine importance. Few men were more conscious of both than he, and even in those moments when the comic mask fell away completely, there was something in the solemn air of pompous judgment and disciplinary wisdom which to any one but his adoring brood would have seemed most funny.

For Tom Meadowburn the world, whether of New Orleans or Winnipeg, or the new city that had lately taken them in, was a place where he and the wife and children were "getting on." The Meadowburn household was, in his mind, something very much like heaven, himself presiding. For Ellen, as he often said, it was a refuge under his protecting arm, wherein she need never come to harm nor suffer want. And to her credit she believed him and worked all the harder to please him.

Physically Meadowburn was a tall stout man with a heavy, pink, unwhiskered face, the pale eyelashes and tow hair being lighter than his skin, and the small, quick eyes a transparent, hardly

perceptible blue. As a humourist he was not one of your torrential and generous laughers. He was sly and dry, a wrinkle, the flicker of a smile, a knowing arch of the eyebrows being his favourite manner of accentuating his point. He was in the habit of twitting Ellen on the subject of marriage.

"Now then, my girl," he would say, "what are you keeping from us? What have you got up your sleeve? Didn't I hear you come in a little late last night? Walking, eh—of course, not *alone?* We wouldn't permit you to walk alone."

"Ellen went to the drugstore for some medicine for me, last night, Tom," interposed his wife.

"Well, well, Ellen," he went on, "you must remember you're perfectly free. We wouldn't keep you from marrying when the right man comes along."

"Yes, and maybe I will marry, sooner than you think! You watch out, Mr. Meadowburn!"

The pleasure of this stock joke lay in the fact that none of the Meadowburns believed there was danger of Ellen marrying, of any one caring to marry her, at least, whose social position would suit her. For she did not have kitchen-maid standards, as they knew. And she believed there was no danger either. She felt very old. . . .

It was into this somewhat harsh and lonely existence that Potter had thrust his genial, boyish appearance, and by some strange affinity of comradeship, they had taken to each other at once.

He too, as she was soon to learn, was lonely and cherished his dreams; and it comforted her to have a champion—even so young and small a champion as he. Was he so young and small? There were times when he frightened her with flashes of grown-up speech. It did not always seem quite nice, quite appropriate. For example, one evening when they were talking about perfectly ordinary matters, he burst out:

"You're like Christ, Ellen. If He could be on earth He wouldn't love Dr. Minor or any of those people in the church. He'd pick you."

Her first thought about this was that it was deliberately bad, as bad as his smoking and his score of other boy tricks. It was blasphemous and wildly untrue. She sent him away in disgrace, much discomfited and hurt. Probably this rudeness of her own was what brought her so swiftly around to forgiveness, or it may be that she came to look kindly on his tribute. In any event, she gave Bennet a note for him, a queer, misspelled, dignified note. . . .

When Potter returned she told him that he "must not think of Jesus as a person but as God, and that was the end of it."

II

The next Spring, which followed on the heels of his fourteenth birthday, held a wonder for Potter Osprey such as he had not experienced before. Until now the green buds and soft winds had meant a time for the surreptitious stripping off of shoes and stockings after school (and out of sight of home), the agonizing anticipation of three long months of holidaying, and the making of limitless plans for outdoor fun. This year he welcomed the bright weeks not as a rowdy boy, but with a conscious relish that came from a deeper source within him.

The Spring itself, as if it also were filled with a sense of unusual importance, was precocious. When Potter, late every afternoon, ambled along the several blocks of blatantly new sidewalks that led to the church, the grass hid the softened brown earth with an abundance of delicate colour wherever feet had not trod, the robins and squirrels skipped perilously about the pavements and lawns oblivious of savage man, and exultant banks of snowballs escaping over the picturesque shingle- and iron-railed barriers of the old Clemons place, were just on the point of changing from their pale shade of willow bark into

round fluffs of dazzling white as big as a boy's head.

These Lenten afternoons were moments of solitary poetry in his days. The still church, the long slanting rays which came through the coloured glass windows to the west; the faint perfumes that rose into the ogival shadows above the nave, emanating from the hair and handkerchiefs and bodices of lady worshippers, who made up the majority (and the subtle pleasure with which he felt the eyes of these fine women on his broadening back as he walked down to the chancel carrying the offertory); the pervasive, vibrant drone of the organ, which had always been like a physical caress to him; and the saintly beaked profile of the rector, Dr. Minor, with its high, peeled brows, and black, unruly hair, dominating an almost chinless jaw; and, finally, between the breathing of the organ pipes, and the shrill singing of the feminine congregation, Dr. Minor's broad Virginia accents and consoling overtones and melancholy quavers —all these sensations produced a mingling of peace and the awareness of sacrifice, which was like a bath of goodness.

The church itself was charming to look at, built in the late 'eighties of shingles now coloured a warm brown by many rains, and properly vine-hung. The little building with its limited open meadow and well-grown trees drew him at times when he had no particular business there. It was

a favourite place to read. Often he would arrive an hour or more before the service and sit huddled up in one of the corners of the deep verandah, intent upon his pastime, until the brisk step of the rector sounded on the boards below; and if Dr. Minor happened to espy him he would be conducted cheerily into the study, while the lanky priest put on his vestments and asked him questions about his work at school and the health of his "dear mother," who, much to the clergyman's disappointment, came almost never to the services.

These innocent confidences sometimes went so far as a mild spiritual examination which had more significance than its casualness indicated. Minor regarded young Osprey as promising material for the ministry.

"The type for scholarship and consecration," he told his wife. "A sensitive boy, thoughtful and retiring—Oh, manly, manly enough! A little conviction would turn that into spiritual leadership. His family could do nothing better than give him a seminary training. And a part of our duty, my dear, is to be fishers of men, to look out for new recruits to bring under His banner."

Minor loved to roll forth militant symbols in his reflections upon the mission of the Church. His early gods had been the deeply pious heroes of the South. Stonewall Jackson and General Lee took rank with him very little below the Apostles.

There was one other who shared this secret ambition for Potter—Ellen Sydney—until a recent incident in which he had figured shook her faith.

This affair produced something of a scandal in the Osprey family. Searching one day through the shelves of an old closet for one of his brother Kirk's discarded school books which it was now his turn to use, the boy had come across a half dozen large, handsomely bound portfolios. He had drawn one out and leaved it over, fascinated on the instant. The sheets were of lovely texture, beautifully printed, and the covers of a flexible, warm-toned, heavy parchment. He felt a sense of incomparable luxury in the very touch of the books.

The contents were no less absorbing. Between the pages of French text were reproductions of paintings hung in the Paris salons of the mid-'nineties, the majority of them nudes of that languishing and silken type beloved by the French school of that day, the studio renderings of a flock of anonymous Bouguereaus. Forgetting his search for the school books, Potter took the volumes to an attic room where he consulted them many times in the following weeks, and a collection of nude sketches came from his pencil, copied sometimes from the originals and sometimes attempted from memory.

The upshot of it was that his mother swooped upon him one day just as he was finishing a

particularly elaborate drawing. It was taken from him and shown in excited secrecy to John Osprey.

Osprey was cut of a different cloth from Meadowburn. In a ruminant, half-serious talk (a ray of amusement flickered in his eye on actually facing the boy alone) he quoted the Scripture according to St. Paul, and enjoined him to resist putting away childish things until he was on the way to become a man. Then he dropped a sly hint that if the youthful artist really had to draw improper subjects it would be a good thing to keep them from his mother. There was other good advice to the effect that it was both harder and more practical to draw people the way they were usually seen in life, but this passed largely over Potter's head.

He promptly diagnosed the interview as a vindication and he saw no harm in telling the adventure to Ellen, but to his utter surprise she was inexpressibly shocked; so much so that she left him on the Meadowburn steps without even a goodnight.

As he had related the story, coolly, indeed boastfully to her, the feeling came over her that the next time she raised her eyes to observe him she would see a coarse, swarthy young man with stubble whiskers whom she ought to be afraid of. The contrast between this fancy and his actual appearance was a little laughable—yet the notion of his interest in a woman's body, a thing he could not,

as she reasoned, naturally have seen or even been strongly moved to see, was more than she could grasp.

For many days she watched him passing the house with other boys, his eyes casting furtive and unhappy glances at its windows, and hardened her heart. Then she could bear it no longer, and once more Potter received a scarcely legible, lady-like note of prim forgiveness.

To-night he was to see her for the first time since that event. . . .

In Creve Cœur suburb a clear division existed between the old and the new, marked by a certain trolly line. Northward lay the flat, banal commons in which the Ospreys and the Meadowburns lived, but to the south were houses mellowed by long custom, set deep in cool lawns, and facing arched avenues of maples and elms under which one trod decaying and rickety pine-board walks or crossed the tremulous bridges spanning a serpentine creek that drained the valley.

The quaint modesty of Florissant lane, its uselessness and hidden charm—the thick maples and high shrubbery cutting off even the sight of neighbouring windows—made it a fairy road, a retreat in which Potter had already learned to spend fine mornings of October and May when his mother thought him safely at school. As for Ellen, her first autumn glimpse of it, nearly a year ago, had taken her back to greener memories in the north.

She could never walk there too often; it was as near to complete demoralization and unbounded luxury as anything her starved imagination could picture.

Ordinarily they sat upon the steep terraced slope at the end of the lane, whence one could look down its leaf-fretted vista, or peer over one's shoulder into the sombre depths of the rarely-visited Florissant place, but to-night he was more venturesome. He led her through the path behind the wall of Annunciation's big enclosure, until they came to the end of the terrace. Beyond was an open field, once the pasture of the Florissants, and still a part of the property, empty and unused. In its centre through the dusk loomed a dark little hillock clustered with poplars and fir-trees.

It was not hard to believe oneself continents away from the noise of any familiar street or the lights of Creve Cœur houses. Directly fronting them lay the dim mass of Annunciation, its half dozen French turrets and many spires floating out of the treetops into crystalline starlight. Potter had often sat in that very spot and pondered on the mystery of this religious stillness, on the utter distance which separated its life from any he had known, its community of young and vital beauty sternly and perhaps rebelliously subordinated to withered holiness. By a paradox of the

law of boyhood, the girls in the convent—boarders from comfortable families everywhere in the states—were the subject of vulgar joking among the youngsters thereabouts.

To Ellen the convent was not benign; it was a little terrifying and monstrous. All her life she had been awestruck by anything that suggested the gigantic and august power of Rome, and her head was full of legends concerning that religion and its devotees. Superstition had required of her that she regard them—not as individuals but in the mass—as a sinister species apart from ordinary people.

Potter remarked that when there was bright moonlight the steep slate pitches of the convent roof looked as though they were sheeted in snow.

"There's lots more of those places in Canada than here," said she. "They're not all that they should be, either. Think of sending young girls there!"

"Why not?" he asked.

She now regretted her outburst and was annoyed at his question. She answered primly:

"Why, I wouldn't tell you, of course."

He laughed, unconcerned and superior.

"Pshaw, I know what you mean. I've heard those stories too—about nuns being in love with priests. But I don't believe them."

"Oh, you don't?" inquired Ellen sarcastically.

It was not that she did not think it admirable of him to dislike believing evil of people, but one need not go so far as to defend Catholics. . . .

"No," he said. "You know why?"

"Well, why, smarty?"

"Because even people outside of such places, convents and the like, even people who are grown up and free to do as they please—well, they never do anything they want to do. I mean things that just pop into their heads to do."

"Ah, don't they?" asked Ellen, by this time amused. "And how are you so sure they don't?"

"I just know. They're too dog-goned cowardly."

"Well!" she exclaimed, "that's a fine thing to be calling people who behave themselves!"

"Then they don't think of anything bad that they want to do," he persisted. "You wouldn't call that being good, would you, Ellen? Pshaw, what's the credit in that?"

"It's well for them they don't think of such things," she declared. "To hear you, a person would believe you wanted to be tempted."

"No, I hate it, honestly," he replied, and she felt that he was trying to speak truly of himself. "I used to say that part of the Lord's prayer, about 'lead us not into temptation,' over twice. I did, for a long time. Because, you see, I'm really tempted—always, every minute."

He paused after this announcement, which, in

spite of his sincerity, had a note of pride, and Ellen broke in, thinking that the moment had come to speak of what was most in her mind.

"Potter, you haven't been making any more of those pictures, have you?"

She felt him shift quickly to the defensive.

"Yes, I have," he said. "I've finished two more."

"Well, I'm ashamed of you."

"Why do you mind them so much, Ellen?"

"You don't have to ask me why."

"But I do, because my father didn't think they were bad. He only lectured me for show!" He chuckled at the recollection.

"Ah, Potter, your father is a grown man! Men do lots of things that you shouldn't think about. You're just a child. Those pictures! What's the good of them anyway? Nice people wouldn't have them around."

"Some people would!" he declared stoutly. "They're beautiful, or my father wouldn't have kept them . . . and the one I've just finished is the best, oh, lots the best I've done!"

She sensed a strain of profound unhappiness in his voice, and all her instincts flew to soothe the hurt.

"I don't mean to be hard on you, Potter," she said. "You worry me, that's all. I can't see why you bother about these things that other people never think of."

"Aw," he said, "never mind, Ellen. I guess I don't know what I want. It's no fun being a boy when you'd like to be a man."

They both fell silent, listening to the trees chattering overhead like live things. The breeze that stirred them was growing chill, and Potter, responding to the kindlier tone of his companion, moved closer to her. His last words and this unconscious movement of affection touched her. She put a rough, friendly hand on his arm, and they sat there in silence for a time. It was he who broke it. . . .

Suddenly a strange plea came pouring from his lips in a torrent of eager words, a plea that she all at once realized she had many times before dreaded—and laughed at herself for dreading. . . . She sat, scarcely breathing, with averted face. He ended abruptly, frightened at the sound of his own voice. She said nothing. Surely she understood him. What was she thinking?

She turned toward him at last, and he found himself looking into her black eyes that glowed like coals despite the mantle of dusk. Her parted lips closed in a tight line.

"Well," she said, with slow emphasis, "if that's what you mean, I'll tell you this. I will never do such a thing."

She was on her feet in an instant, her tall body like a statue of rebuke crushing him in its shadow.

"Come," she said coldly.

"Yes," he replied. "I'm sorry, I'm awfully sorry, Ellen."

At that moment, as they started homeward from Florissant's field with the darkness between them, her swishing, angry stride filling him with a new knowledge of mystery and awe, there was no doubt that they both meant what they said. But in Ellen a certain helplessness and fear were born. Struggle as she might from now on his very presence would be a menace, and his presence was more than ever a necessity. For the cry that he was uttering was one that her own heart understood.

. . . . . .

So it happened that a few months later when the Osprey family were at a country hotel for the summer, he and Ellen met in the empty house and walked hand in hand through the rooms—her sworn promise whirling in his brain. She was stiff and awkward, but he was in high spirits, perhaps a little hysterical, fondly imagining he was entering upon a new paradise of experience. . . .

III

Emmet Roget, twenty, and Potter Osprey, nineteen, both juniors at the University, were sitting naked one afternoon on the long parapet which formed one of the banks of Milton's abandoned quarry. Behind them the stone wall fell away a sheer twenty feet to the gulch below. In front, licking the tops of the three-foot barrier, lay the broad sheet of deep, clear water. Their white bodies dripped opaline flakes in the sunset. From time to time they shivered in the chilly late September wind.

A pale, luminous dory of a moon floated low in the delicately blue and pink expanse of sky that lay over the town. The surrounding flat country was infinitely still, infinitely peaceful.

Potter suddenly droned forth in the melancholy baritone the two affected when reading Swinburne and other modern poets:

"The wandering moon, an optimistic sprite
Etched a pale border 'round the face of night. . . ."

Emmet was silent for a moment, and then as though the sound of the quotation had travelled to him from a distance, burst out:

"Gosh, man, where did you get that?"

The other reached over boisterously and clapped his friend's shoulder.

"A trial of my own! All you need to be a poet is to suffer from insomnia, the way I did the other night."

"Well, you can write."

"Eh? But I'd so much rather paint."

"Better look out. You may have more talent for writing than for painting." Potter sensed a criticism in the remark, which he privately resented.

"No, the thing I'll never be able to do is the thing I'm going to do."

Emmet did not reply at once, and his sleepy blue eyes, long and narrow between the lids, rested upon an indefinable point of distance. The wind ruffled his dark curly hair that grew low on the brow and temples. He was the handsomer of the two.

"Damn specialists and specialism," he said. "I keep thinking about a synthesis of the arts. Take the theatre, for example. Why not do something like Wagner did—in a lighter, more lyric vein? Bring all the arts together and create a new art? I hate this little business of one man with a pen, one man with a brush and another with a piano, none of them understanding each other."

"A synthesis of the arts is contradictory," said Osprey. "Only Nature can accomplish it, at any

rate, and Nature and art are sworn enemies. Nature takes a tree and gives it form and colour; its leaves rustle and its branches are wood-winds. Then in certain lights the tree will have the elusive, the startling quality of poetry. There you have sculpture, painting, music and literature—but it isn't art, and, thank God, art never will be such a pudding."

"Nevertheless," replied Roget, without controversy and as if to himself, "Nevertheless something can be done that way. What about the church in Renaissance Italy and elsewhere? That was a synthesis—a man didn't paint just to be painting something of his own. He painted for God's sake."

It was really cold by now, and a moment later they were hastily dressing. Roget murmured:

" 'The wandering moon, an optimistic sprite, etched a pale border 'round the face of night.' *Ce n'est pas mal.* It's pictorial and yet it's literary too. Perhaps you will use words to fix your notions for painting. What's that, in a sense, but synthesis, old-timer?" he finished jubilantly.

They went home in the dusk. These were the perfect hours college gave them. . . .

The rural University town of the central states, in the period when electric lighting and telephones were young, when the automobile was as yet a rarity, and the popular senior took his best girl out riding Sundays behind a smart livery tandem,

may have been hideous to modern eyes with its muddy streets, its wooden dwellings and its old-time murky brick and brownstone halls, but it had a mellow and quiet charm that comported well with the spirit of scholarship.

This charm we may assume has been swept away forever. Gasoline and commercial growth, endowments, tudorized architecture, prohibition, short-skirted and long-headed women, energetic chancellors, a wealthier class of students, up-to-date burgher emporiums, moving picture palazzos, Grecian banks, and other vanities of the wicked age have hidden that erstwhile scene, with its air of leisure and moderation, beneath a slick financial veneer that nothing but the fall of federal empire and the end of progress will ever wipe off.

When Potter Osprey arrived at the Athens of his native state it was still a function of one's education to sit with the more or less elect twice a week in one of the three saloons and beer up, to the point where one navigated with difficulty the crossings of perilously high stepping stones and sometimes fell off into honest Athenian mud, which accumulated in viscid pools a foot deep.

If one was only a freshman one might have to be contented with the private room of the "Bucket of Blood"—in a small rear section of which negroes were allowed to drink. Later on, you aimed for the private room at Steve Ball's. The Y.M.C.A. and the Cadet Corps, the latter also a

moral training camp under the guise of military orders, throve, but only among the groundlings. Two obscure fraternities out of twelve admitted members who would stoop to either, unless they were recommended by extraordinary prowess in other and more popular directions.

In those days the dirt-stained farmers in jackboots came to town Saturday morning with heavy carts of solid produce and departed at night-fall with almost equally heavy burdens of liquid joy. Afternoon strollers got their legs inextricably mixed with frantic, squealing hogs, and the smell of fresh manure rose to the fifth story of the Attic House, the tallest building on the local Broadway. Nowadays the farmers come snorting in in Cadillacs as often as they please and go home sober to tot up the double entry ledger with "mommer." It is a changed world and undoubtedly a more leisurely one for college disciplinary committees.

Potter's progress for a year had consisted in desperate efforts to escape his classes toward the end of the week, and to regain some hold on them at the beginning. As often happens, in spite of such practices, or perhaps because of the extra spurts of effort which they made necessary, he regularly stood well in his studies. His second year, however, from the standpoint of conduct, was an improvement over the first. Roget put in an appearance, and Osprey wearied somewhat of smutty

anecdotes, at the telling of which he was never skilful, and found a genuine interest growing in him for his language classes, and even for mathematics.

In the entire town, beside the poet, there had been two people in whom he took an interest. One was a thin, rather angular but not uncomely instructress in the art classes, who had come from New York and the Art Students' League. Potter never probed her jolly, untroubled character very deeply, but she had a firm pencil stroke that he admired, and after a few talks with her he discovered that she breathed a freer air than the folk at Athens. To his fraternity brothers she was a frump, socially impossible. The feminine ideal of the day was the type of Miss Carroll of Carrollton, or Miss Brown from Brownhaven, rich father, proud virtue, sentimental possibilities and skill in the small town graces.

His second admiration was a grey-haired, lean descendant of one of the oldest families in town, a certain Oliver Pruyd, whose hawk-beaked face habitually wore an ironic grin. He was supposed to correspond with the metropolitan newspapers, and his unofficial scholarship had achieved a certain subrosa reputation. But his gains in his vocation were obviously slender and it was not his scholarship that brought him distinction. Pruyd was the only known addict to the use of morphine of whom the community could boast.

Osprey's acquaintance with him had been casual. There was something sinister in Pruyd's mocking expression and wrinkled, flavescent skin. Once, however, the younger man had achieved the brilliance of seeking him out in his small den over the pool and billiard hall, an indescribably neat and carefully arranged place, walled with books and piles of periodicals. Pruyd proved stimulating through three drinks, introducing many hints of literary sources and art lore hitherto strange to his companion. In the days of his family's wealth he had ruined his usefulness by overlong haunting of the byways of Europe.

Beginning with the fourth bourbon, however, the conversation descended to common levels, and the affair ended with their staggering down Broadway like any two other louts expelled from Steve Ball's at the closing hour.

The only other consolation was the college library. In its actual precincts he was often uncomfortable because he was critically inspected by elderly persons at the desk for his curious taste in books. This alternately intimidated and enraged him—and almost barred him from the use of the library. But from it he obtained Pater's "Marius" and "Renaissance," prints of Hogarth and Daumier and Michelangelo, "Tom Jones" and Balzac, Rousseau and Voltaire, stray bits of Wilde and Beardsley, and sprinklings of the

French symbolists—shuddersome bombs in those days.

The art class, one of the main objectives of his course (and the sop which his father had thrown him in urging him to take a well-rounded education before he settled down to his choice) was a puerile and primary bore after the first day, a repetition of the drawing of casts in charcoal, to which he had devoted two years at high school—with a prim sketch hour thrown in twice a week in the evening, the members of the class serving as models for fifteen minute studies.

A few weeks after the conversation with Emmet Roget at Milton's Pond, Potter was sitting with a full assemblage of his fraternity brothers at a breakfast of oatmeal swimming in blue milk, biscuits and rancid butter—which was all the country town could furnish for some curious reason—and pork chops well immersed in grease. The house manager that season was an economist, loudly cursed at every meal, but immensely appreciated at the end of the month when the pro-rated statements came around.

They were not a well-to-do nor a polished crowd. Raw-boned, plebeian, familiar—tobacco-chewers from the agricultural towns getting their first taste of a dress suit—they nevertheless had their pride and social standards. Potter, for example, though he liked them well enough—indeed had been daz-

zled by several of their more suave and persuasive members during the first few weeks after his matriculation—was now, on account of those standards, nursing a private feud against the whole organization. The cause of this feud was their refusal to invite Emmet Roget to join, a man, thought he, better bred than any of them. They had taken in two gawky, mannerless Freshmen that year, sons of zinc barons from the mining counties, but they would not have Roget.

Potter understood the reason well enough, but his resentment was all the more keen on that account. Roget was rejected for personal characteristics which he himself would like to have exhibited oftener. He, also, did not quite belong in the group, and his influence, which for some reason was not inconsiderable, would have waned quickly had he been more frank about his own tastes. Roget did not lack that frankness. He was poor, but poverty was no bar in that fraternity. The trouble was that he was not ashamed of having won the Whittier prize for verse in his freshman year. He had needed the money. He pronounced his name in the French manner and sat in a corner quietly cynical at dances. He was pretty generally admired by girls, but that could be a fault in a person you instinctively disliked; and he turned up one evening at a smoker wearing a wrist watch. In the first administration of

Roosevelt, a man was either a "good scout" or a "crumb," and the best looking and brainiest chap on earth, if he did these things, was a crumb.

The crowd was beginning to leave the breakfast table, some of them rushing off to eight o'clock classes and others moiling onto the porch for the first Bull Durham "drag" of the day, and bawling a good-natured "hello, men" to students hurrying past from other houses.

Potter had an eight o'clock class and was late. As he started off, however, he took up a letter addressed to him, from the table in the hall, and stopped in his tracks. He stared again at the superscription and the eight o'clock class dropped completely from his mind. The letter was in a hand that he knew well, and the sight of it instantly smote him with fear. He looked about to see if any one was watching and turned to flee to the bathroom upstairs, the only place in the house where privacy was possible. On second thought he walked quietly by the group on the porch and went up the street. A ten minute lope brought him to the deserted little nine-hole golf course outside of town. He could not help thinking how benign, how untroubled the fields were in the brisk, delicious morning. They calmed his pounding blood and sent a wave of optimism through him.

"What a fool I was to miss my class," he mut-

tered aloud. "It may not be anything at all." He sat down on a sandbox and hurriedly opened the letter.

"Dear Potter," it ran, "It's happened as I was afraid. I'm nearly three months gone. Dr. Schottman won't help me. He says he never does that. I haven't got much money, and don't know what I'm to do.

"Yours truly,

"Ellen."

IV

The blow, which he had many times dreaded, but which for two long years he had thought of as blissfully escaped, had fallen. Until the summer just passed, that length of time had elapsed—the first two years of his University life—during which the affair with Ellen had reverted to its original innocence. Before that they had drifted on, taking what opportunities they could find. Potter, sometimes conscious that the thing was an ordinary slavery, had struggled against it from time to time, but half-heartedly. Habit and gratification were too strong. Then, in a blinding flash of awakened responsibility, he realized that physical consequences followed such relations, and under the guise of moral repentance, he went to her and told her he wished to end it.

Ellen acquiesced simply enough in this, as she acquiesced, perforce, in everything that concerned her. She dumbly worshipped him, but she knew how much that mattered.

Then had come the summer of this year. It was accident that threw them together one night, one very magical night, as Potter recalled. Both were lonely; the Meadowburn family were all away on an August journey. Their old intimacy,

which in reality had been sordid and furtive, took on a certain beauty—the sentiment of past things. Under that momentary glamour forgetfulness took possession of them.

"She said," recalled Potter, "that was the first time she had been thoroughly happy and secure."

He ruminated on, connecting this sudden, vivid pleasure of hers, this mood of safety and surrender, with the deadening outcome they now faced. His own fear had never left him since that night —that one night, for it had had no sequel. Now he interpreted the event fatalistically. Nature had waited for that happy mood of Ellen's before making her a mother. Nature was a subtle monster, a thing of scheming purposes. She let you go on and on with impunity and then tripped you when you weren't thinking, when you felt particularly strong because you had put up a long fight against her. She could even, in this awful moment, make him thrill with the knowledge of having created life. . . .

Potter had never had a confidant in the affair with Ellen. So far as he knew the secret was her own and his, and had been from the beginning. And it was something of a miracle, considering their narrow escapes from detection.

But now that he needed support there was no one to turn to. Roget was the last person in the world to whom he could take such a tale. He had an idea that Roget would laugh him to scorn or

question his taste in becoming the victim of such an intimacy. Roget had been raised among women and had acquired a knowledge of them that made his relations toward them seem little short of uncanny to Potter. He gave the impression of being successful with many and quite uninvolved with all. To Potter women were the paralyzing mystery. It was one of the subjects on which he and Roget did not meet.

Had there been an older man in town with whom he had developed any sympathy, a faculty member or a person in authority of any kind, he would have gone to him. There were many questions; there was money to be got; there was commonsense guidance needed as to doctors and other such matters, instinctively repugnant and dreadful to him.

Marriage! Sometimes in the dead of night, lying awake with his fears, anticipating just this predicament, he had experienced exaltations, mystic desires for sacrifice and immolation and simple, laborious living; it was a surviving remnant of his intense religious life as a very young boy. In such moments his mind had admitted the idea of marriage. In broad day, the thought became abhorrent. And in all the broad days that had preceded this one, his fears also had melted with the sun; but now they would not melt. . . . He knew perfectly well that he would urge marriage upon Ellen, sincerely in a fashion. He knew

also that she would flatly refuse, and that he would accept her refusal with relief.

Yet what was she to do? He counted on no sympathy from the prudish Meadowburns. They would loudly invoke the names of their young daughters and fly from the scene. The family physician, Schottman, a tolerant German-born physician of real ability, had taken an odd sort of liking to Ellen and never visited the house without having a talk with her wherever he happened to find her at work. He had been their hope in earlier discussions. With him, there would be no danger, while with others—Potter writhed before the spectres of horrible little operating rooms, of death in agony, of murder and police and squint-eyed judges with nose-glasses. But Ellen's letter had settled Schottman.

It was past noon before he realized it, and the golf links were becoming populated by a few straggling faculty men with clubs. He aimed for an outlying street which led into town and the act of motion toward a definite objective revived his spirits, which had been sinking hopelessly into the quicksand of despair. He went to the bank and drew out all of his small balance but a dollar. The previous day his check had come and he had paid his scot for October at the fraternity house. It was rare that his remittances from home exceeded forty dollars a month. He converted the larger part of the sum he withdrew into a money

order at the Post Office and mailed it to Ellen, with a short note in which he told her he would see her somehow before long, and if possible to do nothing until then.

"Money," he thought, as he stepped out of the Post Office, "if one just had enough money one could fix up anything!"—an idea that had come to him before in many a tight place and morning after. He fell to day-dreaming about what he would do for Ellen if he had money, money in his hand, money in plenty.

The mailing of the letter had brought a sudden release to his feelings. It would cheer her up to hear from him.

In this state he responded more willingly to passing acquaintances, did not avoid the livery stable man and the candy man, and the dozen other town bodies who were always about. Catastrophes, he reflected, had their good points. They furnished a reason for cutting classes and loafing on a beautiful Fall day. He was tempted for a moment to call on Roget, who lived, as no one but he would have lived, on the native side of Broadway, a short distance off. But he decided against it. He would be pressed to talk about his trouble and that he had resolved not to do except in the worst extremity, and certainly not to Roget.

The decision to avoid Emmet left him no alternative, and he drifted into Steve Ball's bar. Those dark, quiet, wet-smelling precincts were de-

serted at that hour, so far as his familiars were concerned. He was glad they were. It would not have been easy to conceal the turmoil within him, if forced into an extended conversation. He would take a drink or two, slowly, he concluded, go home and try to forget the whole thing, and tomorrow with a hard head, he would work out a plan of action.

Frank, the experienced bar man, wiped up the much scarred and initialled table of the private room, and hovered in the doorway with a friendly smile.

"This is the sort of companionship a fellow needs in my fix," thought Potter. "Nothing like it. A good barkeep."

Frank, however, soon proved too busy to talk, and Potter was left to his own thoughts. The effect which liquor usually had on him was to produce three distinct stages. It plunged him first into a dreamy and altogether pleasant condition, in which his lot appeared the rosiest in the world, and he radiated good will on all sides. This led to melancholy and a gradual feeling of boredom with everything, aggravated by a tendency to analyze his wrongs and conduct long, unspoken conversations about them with the persons presumed to be responsible for wronging him. Then followed a feverish desire for physical motion, and the making of quick decisions, obeyed on the instant, however ill-advised.

The first state of high spirits brought him agreeably to six o'clock when he left Steve Ball's for fear of encountering early drinkers from the Campus. He was hungry and bolted sandwiches and coffee in a nameless lunch-wagon around the corner. He found himself after that in the "Bucket of Blood." Night had fallen; the place was unspeakably sordid with its dim lamps and shuffling bums, and his problem once more assumed proportions that harried him. He began to assail Ellen for ever having permitted the intimacy to start. Then he quickly reacted from that attack. A profound, overwhelming wave of self-abasement engulfed him. If there was suffering to be done poor Ellen would endure all of it. She had been his victim and had given him what she had to give, in all things. Had their ages been precisely reversed, he could not have been more responsible.

As he ordered another bottle of beer, he became acutely conscious that his money was disappearing. There was no more to be had, certainly for several days. Mails had to take their time, even if there was anything to hope for from them. This sense of impecuniousness made his mind veer to another complicated grievance. In one of the banks at home, held for his use at majority, lay what now seemed an incredible sum of money, from his grandmother's estate. He had twice entreated his father to allow him to draw modestly

on it. His father had not refused in either case, but had probed good-naturedly into his reasons for desiring it. But why, thought the boy, should his father have to know his private business? How could his father understand his peculiar needs? These questions had rankled time and again.

And now, he reflected bitterly, now that the trust fund might be the means of lightening a burden that would follow him all his life, it would be the same old story with his father. He would have to make a full confession of the case. But he could not do this. How could he tell his father such a yarn? Weren't his whole family concerned as much as he? Was there not a question of blood relationship involving them? Common delicacy and loyal feeling toward them demanded that he conceal the truth, unless he took the burden upon himself and parted with them completely. He had thought all this out before and settled it. There was nothing he could say to his father.

These reflections, repeated over and over again, embroidered upon, attacked at every angle, adorned with many duplications of the same phrases, led nowhere. The bill at the "Bucket of Blood" had to be paid, and nothing was left to do but to get up and go. Well, well, he felt like moving anyhow. If only there were anything he could do now, right now, it would be a relief. He started walking rapidly uptown toward the fraternity

house. Then at the corner where Broadway turned into his own street he stopped abruptly.

"What a fool!" he muttered aloud. "What a triple-plated iron-head! Why did I send that money to Ellen? Why didn't I go myself?" He stopped and began to curse his idiocy with all the eloquence and thoroughness of which he was capable.

Then he reflected, again aloud: "But is it too late? The jerk-water goes over to Jamestown in half an hour. I could make it to Jamestown. But I haven't enough money to go all the way. Well, I've got enough to go to Jamestown."

The thought of bluffing his way on the through train with a promise to pay at the other end rushed into his mind. His name, his identification by letters in his pocket, his father's acquaintance with railroad officials, these might carry him through. He turned and started toward the station.

"If I can get home I can raise that money. I can raise it on a note. I can get some Jew like Stern to shave the note. Or maybe I can get it from Colonel Cobb. I'll bet Colonel Cobb would let me have it."

This line of reasoning had to be exhausted with the usual number of variations and redundancies as he sat in the little branch train of two cars, with its dusty, worn plush seats, its threadbare

blue trainmen ambling back and forth, and its scattering of anonymous, unimportant-looking passengers. Fortunately nobody was leaving town that he knew. That was to be expected six weeks after the opening of term. For the first time, the thought struck him that he himself was bolting, perhaps for several days, without the formality of an excuse from the Dean, without even notifying the men at the house. Ordinarily this would have been a serious infraction of the rules, punishable by suspension.

"I can't help it," he thought, "I've *got* to go. If they knew why I guess they'd think so."

This, however, upon reflection, sounded illogical and inadequate. The danger of trouble with the authorities would not down so easily. There'd be mystery in his disappearance, a search would be made for him in the morning, and a wire probably sent to his folks. A moment later he had the solution. How easy! He could fix that up by telephoning the fraternity from Jamestown. It would cost him a quarter and he'd still have more than a dollar left. He would get old Ed Taylor to see the Dean to-morrow. Some lie would do. Ed could turn the Dean around his finger. Maybe he could keep the whole thing from his father. He could, if he slipped back to town on the next night's train. If his father got hold of it, he'd be puzzled, want to know things, and this was no time to be submitted to questioning of any kind.

"At the same time," he pursued, "I'd better not try the through train. Fellows have been pinched for it. They might take me off the train at Fayette, and then, oh, my God. . . ."

A picture rose before him of a night in the county jail, of wiring home for money to pay his fine, of his father coming to Fayette, of scandal untold and unending, and no help to Ellen whatever. Rather the reverse, because he would be in disgrace and his hands, therefore, completely tied for some time to come.

"No, I can't try the through train. Too big a chance. I wonder how about the freight. Hell, plenty of other fellows have done that, with no worse results than a swipe on the ear or a bawling out. Besides I've got a little money. Brakies are all right."

The wind at that moment coming through the leaky train was devilishly sharp, and he had no overcoat, nothing but his fall-weight suit. It would be still colder later, especially on an unprotected freight car roof, which was the only place he could think of to ride.

"Can't help it," he concluded. "It's got to be the freight. I can get a half pint of rot gut at Jamestown. Keep me warm enough. It's just a nice little ride in the open air."

An hour later, with his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his bottle in his breast pocket, Potter stepped from the smoke-draped, kerosene-smell-

ing barroom of the little junction town. By buying a round of beer for two loafers he had obtained the advice and information he wanted. The freight train now resting on tracks just back of those on which the through train was soon expected would pull out for his destination about ten-thirty. He crept down perhaps a half a dozen cars from the station and found himself practically in open country. An overgrown fence lay twenty feet to the side of one of the big, dirty-looking red cars. He sat down in the shadow of the fence to wait, listening to the frogs in the dim, unwelcoming marshes behind him.

Once as he sat there a man ran along the top of the train from the caboose far off at the end of the line of cars and came back. Once just a little before the scheduled hour, he heard cinders being crunched under foot in the direction of the engine. The flashing rays of a lantern, swung from an invisible shoulder, played under the cars and the figure carrying it passed by hurriedly on the other side. At every coupling the lantern was swung up between the cars. Osprey knew now why the roustabouts had told him to lie low and keep away from the train while it was still.

"Wait 'til she gives her first jerk, then grab her and climb like yer momma was after you."

Whistles shrieked and soon a long, noisy shiver travelled down the length of the cars. Potter jumped for the iron treads closest to him. The

train was moving off and he with it. Once on top of the car, he laid full length, making himself as small as possible on the side of the roof farthest from the station, until it should be passed. Beyond the little town he breathed freely, took a comfortable seat on the flat boardway in the centre with his legs dangling over the car's end, and gripped the rusty steel shaft of the brake.

V

At first he did not mind the bumping, nor the penetrating wind, nor the coldness of the metal on his palms. The occasional showers of cinders were annoying, and this grew worse as the train increased its speed. Nevertheless, he was exhilarated; the motionless friendly stars overhead, the sense of succeeding in a wild and unreasonable adventure gave him courage and high spirits. He only had to stand it for a few hours and a few hours of discomfort never had killed anybody.

Misgivings crept over him gradually. His seat was being severely lambasted by the bumping. It seemed incredible, in a way, how it kept up and the violence of it. The steel bar to which he held grew increasingly cold, yet he realized that come what may he would have to cling to it or stand a chance of falling. The wind became more biting and between it and the bar his fingers were stiffening fast. The cinders, stinging his face with only brief cessations, might soon be unendurable.

However, he argued, he could bear all these for some time, and when he couldn't bear them any longer, he could do something else, shift his position. He deliberately decided to stand his present one as long as he could, then change and stand

the next one as long as he could. In that way each new position would be so much the greater relief. He would see the night through. A long pull at the flask revived him.

"I'll get my second wind pretty soon," he thought, "and it won't be so bad. That flask was an inspiration."

The night wore on and Potter resorted to first one expedient and then another. He put his right side to the wind and then his left, thus partly protecting his face from the cinders. He wrapped handkerchiefs—fortunately he had two—around his hands. It was no good trying to get a decent hold of his board seat. He didn't feel secure that way. These make-shifts did not help his sore buttocks, which were being hammered to insensibility, nor keep off the cold which was creeping over his whole body, but they lessened the number of his pains.

Finally he could endure sitting no longer. He laid down first on one side, then on the other, on his belly, and even for a while on his back. He threw his arms around the brake shaft and doubled his body into a bouncing, shaken ball, in order to keep the cold out of his vitals. At the moment when he thought he was beginning to see the end of his endurance the train ambled benevolently to a stop. He breathed a sigh of thanks and drank.

They were on a siding. As the train continued

still, for five minutes, for ten minutes, a fresh fear assailed him. He had forgotten about the train crew. The fellow at Jamestown had told him to get off and hide whenever the train stopped.

"You got to do that if yer ridin' in sight," he said. Indeed, had the man been a professional tramp instead of a village lounger, he would have scouted the whole idea of riding on top.

But by this time Potter was so stiff and sore in every muscle that he feared being unable to climb back while the train was in motion. The relief from the rushing wind and bumping and cinders was too much. It was too sweet to sit there and recover some use of his limbs, to feel the warm blood in him once more for a brief spell. If he could only smoke or get up and walk about—but that would be dangerously courting attention. He had gone this far, and he would finish it; there was no sense in taking more chances than were necessary.

It was unearthly still. Not a living thing seemed to stir for miles about, over the uninterrupted fields of stubble just visible in the starlight. Even the frogs were silent. Against the sky far off he saw the silhouette of a group of buildings and trees, but they seemed like apparitions in a dream. On the train he was in a separate world, cut off from the other, a lonely world consisting of himself and his thoughts. The long, tapering string of dark cars ahead

struck him like a procession of elephants asleep. They were impersonal and cruel, but alive; and presently would begin to sway and lumber frightfully through the murk. With their stopping his life, it seemed, had stopped.

Time went on. They had been there on the siding for fifteen, perhaps twenty minutes. Suddenly he was conscious of a low, blurred humming which rose from the main tracks alongside, and a succession of whistle blasts at a great distance broke the monotony. The buzz of the rails grew louder and the whistles shrieked again. His tussle with discomfort was about to begin once more, but he felt infinitely rested and refreshed. He sat up straight and peered down the tracks for the sight of a headlight.

"Hullo!"

The head and shoulders of a man appeared over the top of the car, followed by a short, wiry body.

"What the hell's this? How'd you get here?"

"I've got to get to Mississippi City, to-night. I'm from the University up at Athens."

"Don't care where yer from. This here ain't no place fer you."

"Say, old man, you're not goin' to put me off now, are you?"

"H'm." The man leaned over and inspected him familiarly.

"Yeh, you don't look much like a bum. Uni-

versity up at Athens, eh? I've heard some about you God damn loafers, raisin' hell on trains. Why the Christ can't you ride in the cars where you belong?"

"Didn't have the price."

"No. An' you think this railroad's a charity institootion?"

"Say," pleaded Potter, "honest, this is a life and death matter. It'd be a dirty trick to put a fellow off. Le' me go the rest of the way, go on."

The brakeman was obviously relenting. He gazed at Potter's huddled, unhappy looking figure while the passenger train, like a streak of exploding lights on a whirling black band, shot deafeningly by.

"How far are we, anyway?" asked Potter. "Must be more than half way."

The brakeman chuckled.

"We ain't even a third of the way yet. Guess you've been plenty cold up here."

The first sentence fell heavily upon Potter's spirits.

"Gee, seems longer'n that," he said, as casually as he could manage.

"Got on at Jamestown, did you?"

"Yes."

"You got any money?"

"A little," said Potter eagerly. "I'll give you all I've got."

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew it forth with a collection of small change.

"There," he said, counting it over. "It's seventy-five cents."

The brakeman took it.

"That all you got, honest to God?"

"Every cent. I can get more at Mississippi City, though. You going to be there a few hours?"

"Huh," replied the other, "guess you'll need breakfast by the time you get in. Ain't much used to this kind o' business, eh? Well, here's coffee money." He handed back a dime.

"Have a drink, old man?" asked Potter, almost jovially, pulling out his bottle with a distinct feeling of pride.

"Sure."

The man took a long pull at the depleted flask and returned it almost empty.

"Ach," he grunted appreciatively. "That's red eye! Bet you were drunk, boy, an' thought ridin' free was a picnic. Well, better come out o' this and hustle up the track. They's an empty box car about half way up. You'll see it 'cause one door's open. An' you're God damn lucky, son. You'd just naturally a froze a lung off up here an' maybe fell off an' got winged. Shake a leg. Just time to make it. An' hop off well outside the yards when we get to town in the

mornin'. Understand? If you don't you may see the judge."

Before he had finished speaking Potter was stumbling frantically along the cinder track-side. In one end of the empty car was a little dirty straw and excelsior. Two minutes later he was asleep, jolting happily along the streets of paradise in a royal coach. An old man in a brakeman's cap whom he took to be the king of the country sat beside him. . . .

A sudden, wrenching jolt and the screaming of brakes woke him. Daylight filled the car, and in a moment he was out on his feet, recognizing the familiar outskirts of his native city. He plunged into the park, striding vigorously along over new-fallen crisp leaves, warming his body, which had been chilled through during his sleep, even in that protected corner. The woods were gay with the last of the autumn colour; the morning was dewy and mysterious under long corridors of trees. His day's job seemed easy before him, such as it was, and beyond that he was too happy and thankful to speculate. Quite a trip, he thought, thoroughly surprised that he had attempted it and come through all right.

"If I hadn't got potty, I wouldn't be here," he told himself, justifying thereby volumes of alcoholic adventures past and to come.

He looked down at his hands, his trousers, his shirt. He was filthy. It would never do to appear

before Colonel Cobb with the grime of a hundred and forty miles of rough travel clinging to him. But this was the home town, good old home town! and he could get breakfast, new linen and a good wash without the outlay of a cent. He took the car downtown and went first to a store, then to a hotel. By ten o'clock he was breakfasting sumptuously and appeared fairly respectable.

Heretofore, Colonel Cobb had seemed in Potter's mind a sort of complete symbol of good fellowship. The all-weather friend of his father for thirty years, Potter had heard everything there was to know about him that could with discretion be told. He was the old-fashioned type of publicity man, doing business largely through the medium of champagne and dinners. Open-handedness and good nature were traits which a half century of tradition had associated with his name.

A much older man than Potter's father, Cobb wore a beard which was nearly white, but he was one of those veterans to whom a beard imparted an air of boldness and adventure rather than of piety or age. His costume was youngish, smart-looking, but deeply wrinkled by lounging ease. He greeted the young man cordially in his somewhat unpretentious and disorderly office and indicated an upholstered arm chair to him. Potter sank into it and the old man leaned back in his own to survey him.

"Well," he said, "Johnny's boys are growing

up. Let's see, are you the second or the third?''

''Third, Colonel.''

''I know your brother Kirk better'n I do the rest of you. I see a good deal of him up at the Mercantile Club. Kirk's a good boy and looks to me like he's goin' to make his Dad proud. You ain't old enough to drink whiskey, are you? I guess not this time of the morning, anyway. Well, have a cigar.''

He thrust out a spacious box.

''Colonel,'' said Potter, ''you may be surprised at what I'm here for. I'm in a kind of a fix, a bad fix, to tell the truth, and I need money. I've got twenty-eight hundred in the National Trust but I can't draw on it for two years, without my father's consent. I want to get two hundred and fifty dollars on a note for that length of time.''

As he mentioned the amount it seemed so enormous to Potter that he felt a little absurd. He had never handled more than fifty dollars at a time in his life.

''I see. H'm.''

The older man was smoking a well-used meerschaum and took a few puffs on it in silence, looking at Potter quickly once or twice with a more penetrating and appraising glance than at first. The latter noticed, in spite of the Colonel's genial expression, that his eyes, in reflection, became a very cold and impersonal grey.

''H'm, that's bad,'' said the Colonel. ''You see,

your pa and me are old pals. Now, why don't you go over and tell him what the trouble is? There's nothin' in the world you could tell John Osprey that he wouldn't understand. There ain't a thing, son."

"I think there is, Colonel," said Potter gravely.

"Some girl trouble?"

"Yes."

"Now, I'd say you're wrong. I'd say he'd be just the kind of man to take that kind of a story to. Your old man has got nothing to learn about human nature, son."

Potter felt the moment had come for fuller confidence if he hoped to succeed. He had anticipated this objection and intended to combat it by laying stress on his own reasons for not wishing to tell his father. These he felt would make a good impression upon any man. He launched into the broad outlines of his story. Colonel Cobb listened with seriousness and attention until he had finished. When Potter mentioned the manner in which he had come to town that morning his eye lighted up with a spark of the warmth that had marked his first reception.

"H'm," he chuckled. "I like that. Yep, I used to hop those blamed things myself. Then they got me to workin' for 'em, and since then I've had to ride in style—but I don't enjoy it as much."

He ruminated on in silence, puffing at the pipe

held in one hand and combing his beard downward with the other, at every stroke or so stopping to scratch the tip of his thrust out chin, and drawing down his lower lip somewhat in the manner of a bitted horse. Potter noticed the long, blackened roots of his teeth, his puffy, reddish skin, and the tiny network of blood vessels and wrinkles that crisscrossed his cheeks around the eyes and nose. He felt a sudden disgust for life, for the rotten universe and for his own silly predicament. He grew restless, wishing for a decision one way or the other, scarcely caring which it should be.

"You're at college, you said?" asked the Colonel.

"Yes, State University. Two years."

"How are you doin' up there in your studies?"

"Well, a little better than the average, Colonel, right along," said Potter, smiling. It was somewhat less than the truth, yet he regretted the words immediately, as a boast. But the Colonel did not mind.

"That's good," he said, heartily.

He lurched forward in his big leather swivel chair and laid down his pipe.

"The way I figure it out is this," he said. "If you know that there's two of us to get into trouble over this money, instead of one, you maybe will be more careful not to do the wrong thing with it, so it will get out. As for what's the wrong thing I leave that to you. I'm goin' to take a chance on

John Osprey's skinnin' me alive if he hears about this transaction, and I guess there ain't much likelihood of his hearin' about it from you or me, is there?"

He ponderously drew out a long black checkbook, inked the pen and looked at it, inked it again and wrote. Potter received the slip of paper with its figures written in a big, round buccaneer's Spencerian. His fingers trembled in spite of himself.

"But, Colonel," he began, suddenly feeling a sense of guilt.

"I don't want a note," interrupted Cobb, lifting his rotund body by the arms of his chair. "The check's enough. If you don't pay me, I'll send it around to you some day, when you're rich, and you can light your cigar with it or pay, just the way you please. It's made out to cash, so's you won't have any trouble gettin' the money, but you just write your name along the back when you get to the bank. Good luck, son."

With the money actually in his pocket, Potter's despondency abruptly returned. After all, what had he accomplished? The money was useless so far as restoring Ellen to her normal self was concerned. Much more—a simply unrealizable sum—would be needed to enable her to go away in peace and have her child with dignity and comfort. At best, this would only pay the price of a crime. . . .

He found her in much the same mood as his own, tired and resigned. She did not complain or accuse any one at all. But she seemed aching with dull resentment at the inevitable, friendless future, hating it and fearing it. She told him directly that she was not to have an operation. Dr. Schottman had warned that in her case it meant an exceptional risk. Her health was not good and having the baby would put her in fine shape. . . . Potter felt the sting of a lash in every word she uttered. He burst out at last.

"Ellen, you must marry me. You must. There's no other way out."

She did not laugh at him, but she simply refused to heed him. If she had consented he would have felt in that moment infinitely happier; and for even a ray of light in his present darkness, he would have abandoned a great many of the future's promises.

"But what will you do?"

"Dr. Schottman has arranged everything for me. He's to take me to a hospital in a few weeks. I could wait a month or two longer, I suppose, without their knowing it, but I might as well go. At the hospital I'll have to work, until my time. Then he's fixed it with some people for me to stay. They won't mind anything. He's told them all about me. They're patients of his, nice people and well off. The Meadowburns will never know anything, they'll never see me again. Not even

the doctor knows about you and nobody will if you keep still. I'm just to walk out and disappear."

Potter stumbled down the stairway of the pretentious new Meadowburn house in a daze of misery and meanness. Nightfall found him lying face downward in the dried leaves of the park where the woods were thickest. He might have built his house there and never have been discovered for a generation. He might have become like "Clothespole Tom," a hermit hero of his childhood, and sold gopher skins for a living. Some such method of losing himself would have been sweet. . . .

But youth walks forward even though it harbours corroding secrets. He could not escape the vision of Ellen in a hospital uniform, worn and broken-spirited, carrying heavy buckets of dirty water and swabbing down floors with a mop. He went back to college, lifeless and desperate, whipping himself into work with torturing thoughts. By January even his family saw something was wrong, and his father, who saw farthest, told him to make his own plans, to leave school and go where he liked. After a week of dismal idleness at home there followed a telegraphic correspondence with Roget. The two started off together to New York. Three years later, crossing the Atlantic to Paris, Osprey still had not returned to his native city, and he repeated his oath never to go back there again if it could be avoided.

VI

What Ellen Sydney had expected to be her trial by fire proved quite the opposite. It was the beginning of a new and kinder life. For if she had been unhappy at the Meadowburns' it was because of a deep-seated difference between her own native impulses and those of her keepers. Long habit in a narrow rut, listening daily to a cautious and inglorious philosophy, had fostered in her the belief that the great world outside was monstrous and cruel; but she did not find it so. On the contrary, there were many to appreciate her cheerful courage and ready laugh, and return it with affection. Life at the hospital was novel and filled with congenial activity. Behind its unmoral walls was an anonymous and practical community in which her shame quickly melted from her daily thoughts. After the first few days of strangeness and mutual curiosity she saw that none cared how she had come by her situation. Nor were her duties burdensome; without the normal occupation they gave her she would have been ill at ease.

The picture of a drab and bitter Ellen, clattering about a sordid environment with pail and mop —which gave Potter so many secret twinges in his New York room—never came true.

She interested herself in the patients, most of whom she discovered to her surprise were even less able to cope with misfortune than she; the small purse which Dr. Schottman allowed her from the funds Potter had given her was always half open. The many varieties of mothers, and the innumerable enchanting babies fascinated her; but no more so than the coming of her own. As the weeks went by her condition, the manifestations of life within her, gave her increasing importance. It made her for the first time interesting to herself. She thought that she grew more attractive. Her body, long attenuated, took on softer contours under the wholesome diet and freedom from responsibility; her breasts were her particular pride. They changed magically; from stubby protrusions without any character at all, they grew round and firm as they had not been since girlhood.

Then there were the visits of Dr. Schottman. His humorous sallies dispelled in a moment the few worries that came with the long days of waiting. He brought scant news of the Meadowburns, not seeming to care to talk of them. They had been very eager to find her at first, had made a great stir and called upon the police. Then, as suddenly as they took up the search, they had dropped it.

"Ah, they didn't care much, you may be sure," laughed Ellen. It was far from displeasing to her to know that she need not depend upon them. But

immediately she remembered that it was the doctor to whom she owed her present good fortune, not herself; and she felt remorseful.

To Schottman, the hospital seemed to be something of a continuous comedy, and all these mothers, many of them abandoned, caught unwillingly in the grip of natural force, were the victims of a mild practical joke. How much of this was a pose which he found useful in dealing with them, and how much of it a mask to hide a disillusioning experience nobody knew, but it never gave offence. His homely grin and bracing philosophy made him a favourite everywhere.

When she held her child in her arms for the first time a momentary grief oppressed her that it should be fatherless. But the child grew far more pleasing to look at than she had hoped it would be. Its dark hair and unexpected blue eyes made it look unlike either herself or Potter at first. Then a vague resemblance asserted itself, and more strongly on the mother's side. This seemed right to Ellen. The less her daughter resembled the father she was never to see, the better.

Before long she was allowed to take it out in the perambulator Schottman had bought for her. The hospital was located in a bleak, northern section of town, a region long associated in Ellen's mind with the foreign population, principally German, and much sniffed at by people of the West End

where she had lived. She remembered how depressing that day had been when they first drove to the hospital, through wintry streets between endless rows of low-roofed, packed-in brick houses and frame cottages. They had a humbler and more domestic air than she was used to, and gave forth odors of strong cookery, stale lager and of musty parlours seldom opened to the air. But the four months of hospital life in their midst had accustomed her to these exotic touches, and when the people began to overflow into the streets at the first hint of warm weather and to take a kindly interest in her child, she felt drawn to them. It amused her to have them think, as they sometimes did, that she was the nurse or governess.

It was a mistake, perhaps natural, that Dr. Schottman at least viewed with satisfaction. The little girl's charm would serve his purpose with the Blaydons to whom he was taking them. He had never entertained any doubt that Ellen would win them in her own way. Her willingness and modesty, a form of rough good breeding, would recommend her well. But if the child should be really attractive, so much the better for everybody.

"Come now," he teased Ellen, "this little chick has a high tone about her. What you think? Better let me hunt up the young scapegrace and show him what a handsome little rascal he's responsible for."

"How do you know he's young?" laughed Ellen. He had never pressed the question of fatherhood, and she was not afraid that he would ever try to.

"And what will you name it? For it's mother, eh?"

Ellen had settled that matter. She had decided long before on the name of Moira, for Moira McCoy, the pretty, laughing, assistant head nurse, who had been the first to befriend her. But concerning this she also chose to keep her counsel for the present. Another thing troubled her mightily.

"Are these—these people I'm going to live with Episcopalians?"

He laughed.

"I believe there's a division in the family. Ach, these Christian distinctions! They split God up into small pieces like a pie, and each one takes a different slice. They are afraid to get indigestion from too much goodness, eh? But 'Aunt Mathilda'—that is the sister-in-law—is Episcopalian. High church they call it. Oh, very high! It will suit you that way, I guess. And she is the boss. You'll find that out."

High church. That would do very well. It was the serious question of her daughter's christening that disturbed her.

The day came at last to take their fearsome step into a new home. Ellen wept a little over her farewells, but on such a lovely morning she could not be sad very long. She felt so good, so well,

and in the new clothes she had bought for this event she radiated unaccustomed health.

"Look at you," said the doctor. "I told you it would be good medicine. If your old friends could see you they wouldn't know it was the same Ellen."

She blushed. She had never expected to leave the hospital so merry. In a few moments they were driving along in a new-fangled thing called a taxicab, and she had to hold the baby carefully to keep it from bumping. It was the first time she had ever ridden in an automobile, but her thoughts were too far ahead to concern themselves with the novelty. A year ago it would have been a great adventure.

First of all she reflected:

"When Moira is grown up she will love me, and we will do so many nice things together." Then she thought, "Who knows, Moira may have a father some day, and never be the wiser."

The doctor had decided that she was to be known as Mrs. Williams at the Blaydons'. "Aunt Mathilda" herself had suggested this, and Ellen was willing enough to consent. But she accepted with greater reluctance his proposal of a gold band for her finger. The idea smacked of a deception that was too bold by far, a deception that involved higher powers than those of earthly authority, in her mind. She felt almost a criminal whenever she looked at it.

The rattling vehicle swung through an impressive high gate and they were looking down between a row of trees. To their left, running straight through the middle of the thoroughfare lay a grass grown parkway so dotted with shrubs that she got only fleeting glimpses of the houses on the other side. Those on her own side she gazed at with wonder. They were set far apart, with generous lawns, and the suggestion of gardens farther back behind walls and iron grill work. The big houses revealed their age, not only by their old-fashioned and heterogeneous architecture, but by the smoke-grimed look of their brick and stone.

"How lovely and peaceful," thought Ellen, fascinated at the fresh sight of green everywhere spotted and patched with sunlight. She seemed to have been wearing dark glasses for months and months. . . . She noticed that the driver was slowing down his vehicle and was craning his neck for the house numbers.

"My land," she murmured, "we're going to live here. . . . Look, Moira, look!" she could not help but cry aloud—and then flushed pink when she saw the doctor had heard the name.

This was Trezevant Place, its fame already beginning to dwindle, so that Ellen, acquainted only with the new city, had heard of it but once or twice. For two generations the patrician families had housed there, and a few of the original own-

ers had remained, standing on their dignity, defying the relentless town, which had long sprawled up to it, and around it and far beyond, unsightly, clamorous and vulgar. The snob that is in everybody claimed Ellen at that moment and she longed for an audience of Meadowburns and Potters to watch them disembark.

The cab came to an abrupt stop before the bronze figure of a barefooted negro boy holding out an iron ring in one chubby paw. Ellen faced a front door of many bevelled panes of glass which reflected the bright sky into her eyes. Her knees failed her, but with a free hand she grasped the doctor's sleeve, finding in the act reassurance enough to mount the steps between the red stone pillars. A maid appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, it's you, doctor," she said, beaming at them from under her neat white cap. "Mrs. Seymour is waiting in the library. Go right in, please."

Ellen found herself in a room filled with bookshelves, and mahogany, and leather-covered chairs, facing a small lady who did not leave her straight, uncomfortable seat. The greying hair was done up in a knot on the top of her head and behind it was a dark spreading comb. She wore a light blue silk frock with a white collar of lace that folded back over her shoulders and left her neck bare. It was old-fashioned looking, Ellen thought, yet "nice" as she would have put it,

meaning smart, and she noticed that the woman's throat was smooth and plump. Her graceful ankles showed, crossed, above a pair of little grey slippers with very high heels. What a little doll of a person! she thought.

"Good morning, doctor," said the lady, shaking hands with Schottman, while Ellen stood in the door. Then she turned to her.

"Sit down, Mrs. Williams. You mustn't feel strange here, because I am sure we are going to like each other. The doctor has told me nice things about you."

Ellen thought no more of dolls. The assured voice, and what she could only describe as the foreign way "Aunt Mathilda" pronounced her words, awed her. She did not know that this was what people called cultivated. She obeyed the injunction to sit down, her eyes glued trustfully but timidly upon her new mistress.

"I'm not going to keep you long this morning, because for the next day or two you will have little to do and will be getting accustomed to the place. You can take care of the child yourself?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," said Ellen, and smiled. "I've taken care of many more than this one, and done the work besides."

"I see. That's splendid. Well, you will have plenty of time for her. It can be managed very well. Gina is fond of children and will look after the baby when you are busy, and then there is my

nephews' nurse, Mrs. Stone. Gina is my personal maid. The other servants are Marie, who is the parlour maid and waitress, John, the gardener and stableman, and the laundress Annie, who lives out. So the work is pretty well divided. And then there is Miss Wells, the trained nurse for Mrs. Blaydon. The doctor may have told you that Mrs. Blaydon never leaves her room."

Ellen lost track of this catalogue of servants, yet she felt a happy sense of importance in listening to these matter-of-fact and self-respecting details. It was as though she were being taken into the confidence of the household. She tried to attend Mrs. Seymour's every word with seriousness, and felt her embarrassment dropping away from her.

"Dr. Schottman tells me that you have been the only help in the family. I suppose you have done only plain cooking?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, you will have no trouble learning our likes and dislikes, and the way things must be served. Miss Wells will prepare most of Mrs. Blaydon's meals, which are separate. The present cook is to stay until the end of the month, and that will give you plenty of time to catch on. And you mustn't be afraid. We expect to make allowances. Of course, your wages will begin at once, but I can't tell just what they should be until we try you, so we won't discuss that to-day."

"Oh, not at all, ma'am—" began Ellen, and stopped suddenly. "Aunt Mathilda" covered her embarrassment by rising, and Ellen stood also, with her child in her arms. The act brought them close enough together for Mrs. Seymour to see the baby's face.

"What a sweet little thing," she said, and smiled cordially at Ellen. "I hope you are going to be happy here, Mrs. Williams. Marie will show you your room and give you everything you need. Don't bother about your bags. John can take them up at once."

"Oh, thank you," said Ellen. She stood hesitating, after saying a halting, awkward good-bye to the doctor. It was not easy to leave his friendly presence and impossible to thank him as she wanted to. But she turned and in the wake of Marie climbed the broad front steps.

Their carved, heavy banisters and the thick rugs rebuked her. It was as though she realized that in this well-ordered house it would be rarely indeed that she would tread them. Here she was more definitely placed than she would ever have been at the Meadowburns'.

As they passed the second story landing two very small, cleanly dressed boys came out of a big bedroom, with a matronly hospital nurse between them.

VII

Ellen spent her days learning more about the quaint art of cookery than she ever dreamed there was to know, and discovering the ways of rich people which were strange indeed.

One of the first things that impressed her was the unvarying quiet. Never was a voice raised that could be heard beyond the room in which it was spoken, and this applied even to the young masters, who, if they ever made a regular boy-racket, must have done so behind the closed doors of the nursery. Compared to the shouting up and down stairs, the banging of pianos and doors, the general uproar of the Meadowburn household, this was like living in a church. The stately high ceilings and big stained glass windows intensified the illusion.

And the armies of tradesmen who came! She had been accustomed to dealing with one butcher, one grocer, one baker. Here there were dozens who handled a farrago of specialties. There were three or four different dessert-makers, a pork butcher, a beef butcher, a poultry butcher, and a fish monger of high degree; there were a plain grocer, a grocer-importer, a wine-dealer, a liquor agent, coffee merchants and tea merchants,

purveyors of spices and sweet-meats, apothecaries and fruiterers, dealers in milk, eggs and butter, and a score of others whose business did not happen to be with Ellen. All day they came and went. She had thought that supplying a kitchen was a matter of taking in a certain fixed number of staples and making the most of them. But here she found herself in the midst of an immense variety of esoteric materials whose names suggested the index of a geography. The kitchen with its vast conveniences for housing all these things in their appointed places was not unlike a large shop itself.

Formal dinner parties there were, but they were rare during those days, because of the sick woman in the house. And it was well they were! thought she, judging by the lavishness of those she helped to prepare. Mrs. Seymour, however, gave many luncheons to her friends, and for these Ellen delighted to outdo herself, since Aunt Mathilda was not ungenerous with compliments when they were deserved.

These refinements of luxury affected her unconsciously. She was soon trying to acquire the atmosphere of the house, to train her manners after her mistress, to soften her voice and even to alter the accent of her speech, which had always, though she knew it not, been more agreeable than the average.

This instinct of imitation led her to listen, when-

ever she could, to the conversations of Blaydon and his sister. She understood very little of what they said that did not concern the surface news of the family. Often they talked of books, and books were a strange world to Ellen. But one day the thought struck her that Moira, living her childhood in such a house would certainly acquire some of its cultivation, even though no one deliberately undertook to teach her.

But would Moira's mother be worthy of such a companion? Ought she not to make an effort to improve her mind, so that Moira would be a little less ashamed of her in that rosy time ahead when they would understand each other? To Ellen the difficulties of reading were almost insurmountable. Nothing terrified her so much as twenty pages of print. However, once the thought of her unworthiness in Moira's eyes occurred to her, she did not hesitate a moment. From one of the upstairs book-cases she selected the largest volume she could find. It proved to be "Les Misérables," and there was something she liked about the title. That night she began bravely to read.

Hard as it was to make headway in it, she had chosen the only amusement possible to her. When she was not busy in the kitchen, mastering the problems of the stove and the mixing bowl, she sat beside her daughter. There was no chance to think of more exciting pleasures, for which, often

enough, the youth in her still yearned. Yet these duties were only confining, never exhausting. From the sheer drudgery of hard manual labour, to which she once thought herself condemned until she dropped, a miracle had suddenly delivered her. And that miracle was a little child, unlawfully born. Life held many mysteries for Ellen, but none of them was as incomprehensible as this.

The first inkling that they were ever likely to move from the Trezevant place came to her through one of those overheard talks between Sterling Blaydon and his sister. They were sitting one morning in the brick-walled garden just off the rear drawing room, a lovely place, as Ellen knew, to dream and idle in, if it was deserted and she could have Moira tumbling about on the rugs at her feet. There were rows of green boxed plants along the top of the high walls, a striped awning and the clear sky spread between, like another mysterious ceiling farther away. There was comfort and security and the sense of distance too. It was like many other of the civilized refinements which Ellen discovered at the Blaydons', suggestive of an almost incredible degree of foresight, of attention to the details of luxury, which the fortunate of the world had been developing illimitably since the first man was carried on the backs of other men. Mr. Blaydon and his sister often breakfasted in this inner garden on fine

mornings, and Ellen sometimes served them herself in the absence of Marie.

She believed Sterling Blaydon the most romantic personage she had ever seen. His hair was almost white, but he was young in body and in years. His lean, brown face, which she thought had a tired expression when in repose or when he was reading, lighted up marvellously when he smiled. His tall, solid form would have made two of Aunt Mathilda's. Ellen loved to peep through the butler's pantry doors and see him decant the special brandy for his friends after dinner, languid and big-handed and jovial through the smoky fog.

This morning while he sat in the garden in the softest of grey tweeds, with his outstretched legs crossed and resting upon the tiles, she heard his drawling voice as she placed the coffee service fastidiously on the big silver tray in the pantry. Ellen liked to fondle the Blaydon china and silver. It was spoiling her; she would never want to touch anything less valuable.

"I dare say it sounds like blasphemy to you," Mr. Blaydon was saying, "but I'm sick of this place after all. I used to think I never should be."

"It's partly Jennie's long illness. Poor boy, you've had a good deal to contend with."

"I? Nonsense! But I ought to get her away from here. She could pull together faster in the

country. That is to say, if she ever has strength enough to be moved. And there are the boys. I'm beginning to think this is no locality for them to grow up in. If I toss a pebble over the wall there it will land square in the melting pot—perhaps on some anarchist's head who will throw a bomb at me one of these days."

"It's extraordinary how well Trezevant has held its own. There seems to be a spirit in the place that won't allow it to be tainted."

"Tainted enough by coal smoke!" he retorted. "Spirits won't stop that. I'd really like to get out, way out. Not just to follow the crowd, as they say, but we've never had a satisfactory country place, and I've come to think you can't unless you make it a life accomplishment."

"A life is hardly enough, my dear brother," replied Mrs. Seymour. "Trezevant is the accomplishment of three generations."

"Bah!" he replied, good-humouredly, "we're not the slow coaches we used to be. You can get twice as much done these days in a third of the time."

"Well, at any rate, it's unpractical now," she replied, and he recognized the finality of her tone.

Blaydon smoked his cigar in silence, while she finished her second black coffee and leaned back in her chair swinging a tiny foot of which she was proud. In the shimmering, palpable light, shot with many colours, Mathilda's face and hair were

still amazingly pretty. There were many who would have accepted the kind of slavery that marriage with her would have entailed, and some among them who had no need for her money. But she was not thinking of that. The arts of vanity had ceased to be a conscious lure; they were the essentials of well-bred self-cultivation. She had accepted her widowhood as the final failure of man, so far as she was concerned. It had been a romantic love match, ecstatic but unhappy, the kind that she fancied exhausted the capacity for passion; and now her thoughts ran upon the future of her brother's household. For if Blaydon entertained any illusions about the possibility of his wife's recovery, Mathilda did not.

She had long held certain opinions regarding Jennie, which were not shared by the outside world. One of them was that her brother had never loved her, that he had found this out almost immediately after marrying, and determined to live the thing through because of his old-fashioned loyalty. Mathilda had quite certain knowledge that in the midst of the honeymoon he had rushed away and stayed several days. She knew it had been his hour of terrible trial, his angry realization of having made the first major mistake of his life, and made it in full maturity. His sister was proud of him for remaining a tree of marriage in a clearing of divorce stumps—for such their social world was rapidly becoming.

But her theory was that Jennie had never forgiven him, never in a sense recovered from it. She had welcomed her children in order the more to seal up the truth from others; but she had borne them late, and the birth of the second son, Robert, had doomed her to physical helplessness.

This theory explained to Mathilda every peculiarity of Mrs. Blaydon's character, every inexplicable episode which had occurred in the house since she had joined them. Jennie had never liked her; perhaps suspected that she knew her secret. Part of Jennie's satisfaction in having the children was that they would help her to dominate her sister-in-law and the household, in the rôle of mother. As adversaries they had a healthy respect for each other. But Jennie's sustained firmness of will was less effective than Mathilda's, because it was less charming and less hidden. Luck was simply against Jennie. It was Mathilda who would win and then (though Blaydon did not know she had thought much about it) they would go to the country. Naturally this would be their first move. It was inevitable because it was the thing that people of their sort were doing, and because automobiles had made it feasible.

As though she felt that she might hint some of this that was in her mind, she broke the silence.

"Speaking of the country, I've had my eye for

a long time on those tracts in the Errant River hills, where the McNutts have bought."

Sterling Blaydon slowly took his cigar from his mouth and smiled. Like all men of means he liked to have opportunities to display his foresight presented to him without going out of his way to invite them.

"Well then, you've had your eye on what will in all probability be your future home. I've been picking up that land right along. I've got about three hundred acres of it. Moreover, though the Country Club site committee hasn't decided officially yet, I know for a fact they are going to take the contiguous property. It's cheap enough just now, and the club isn't lavish."

He was fully satisfied with the glance of admiration Mathilda gave him.

"Why, Sterling," she said, "how long have you been at that?"

"Since a little while after Hal was born. I got to thinking then this wouldn't do."

"Well, it never occurred to me until this year."

He rose, stretching to his full height to shake the indolence from his body.

"I've even got an architect to work. But I dare say you're right and we can't think about it yet. I certainly can't drag Jennie through a radical change like that, and I haven't even told her for fear it would fret her. But the moment she's bet-

ter— You don't say whether you would really like it or not, Mathilda."

"Certainly I shall like it, dear boy."

He went off humming to his wife's room, before going out. He was, Mathilda thought, more attentive to her than many an enamoured husband, and she admired him for it.

The idea of moving to the country at first frightened Ellen, with that pitiful fear which all dependents have of impending change. What will become of them, they ask themselves, in the general forgetfulness?—and a hundred misgivings and imagined instances of dissatisfaction on the part of their masters throng their minds.

But had she felt secure it would have pleased her. The old house was too formal, too heavy with the fragrances and lingering stiffness of a past day. She could never quite grow to like the eternal quiet. A hearty clattering now and then would have relieved her pent-up vitality. She would have liked, just once in a long, long while to listen to one of Tom Meadowburn's stories, or hear Bennet shouting in the back yard.

VIII

But Mrs. Blaydon grew neither better nor worse and they remained at Trezevant Place. And when Moira was a year and a half old a fresh sorrow visited her mother. So rapid and unforeseen were the steps by which it came that Ellen scarcely realized what was happening.

To her, indeed, the child seemed to acquire new marvels of goodness and beauty every day, but she imagined it was only her mother's pride that made her think so. She was not the sort who would boast of the deeds of her offspring.

Then she grew aware that others shared her interest. More and more, in particular, she found the child, when she came to look for her, in the company of Aunt Mathilda, even in that lady's arms, most happily at home and warmly welcome.

"It is going to be very improving for Moira," was her thought, and she realized with a pang that she had been reading Hugo's book for more than a year now, and was not yet halfway through it.

Mrs. Seymour's brother was among those who noticed her partiality for the baby.

"Look," she said to him one day, with enthusiasm, holding out one of the child's tiny pink

hands, "how remarkably made they are. She's the same all over. I don't think I've ever seen such a perfect baby."

Blaydon laughed, thereby eliciting a brilliant response in kind from Moira. The vibrations of his big voice had tickled her young flesh.

"Well, Mathilda, the broadest road to your heart is still a pair of hands. I remember your telling me that poor old Ned first got you with his."

"Hands and feet," she replied. "I don't mind anything else but they ought to be beautiful."

A few days afterward he came upon her in the garden, again with Ellen's daughter.

"Que voulez-vous," she was saying, "que voulez-vous, ma p'tite? Voulez-vous maman?"

The soft syllables seemed to please Moira's ears, for she was mirthfully bubbling things that sounded not unlike them. As Blaydon stepped out he thought his sister a little apologetic, but she did not put down the child.

"The little thing wandered out here while I was reading," she said. "She quite seems to follow me about."

"You don't find it annoying?" he asked.

Her reply served notice upon him that she had caught his note of irony.

"Oh, no. . . . I'm not such a busy woman as all that."

He glanced at the book she had been reading.

It lay flung face downward with both backs spread out on the table, "Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard." Blaydon recalled the story and somehow connected it in his mind with his sister's essential solitude—her dependence upon his own family for affection.

"I suppose," he pursued, the thought forming suddenly from nowhere, "that you are going to adopt her?"

Mathilda looked up sharply. She pretended to detect in his words more of approval than of inquiry and replied as though he had offered a suggestion.

"You're not serious, Sterling?"

Blaydon's intuition surprised him. He had struck fire, where hardly more than a joke had been intended.

"Why not?" he asked, with a good-natured shrug.

"It seems cruel, somehow," she replied. Her tone was as detached as though she had said, "it seems too green," of a dress-cloth.

"I can't quite see that. Mothers are proverbially unselfish—"

"She would have to be brought up with your boys, Sterling. Have you thought of that?"

He had not thought of that and there was more to Mathilda's remark than banter. As if to influence his reply, the youngest boy, Robert, three and a half, scampered past them and climbed upon

a favourite seat, between two clipped boxwood trees, chattering to himself and grinning across at his father as if to say, "I dare you to come and get me!" But Blaydon ignored him for the moment. He did not know that Mathilda's mind had gone all over this matter of adoption, and that the question she had just put to him, in spite of its unconcerned air, was really a crucial one with her. Upon his feeling about it would depend a great deal, yet this did not imply that she felt herself bound to accept his decisions. There were scores of things that she might do if the whim possessed her, in spite of him. Blaydon was aware of this, and though he did not know how much she had thought about the child, he was inclined toward caution. She was a good sister—a better mother, he honestly believed, for his children than their own. . . . When he answered it was with a laugh that had the effect upon Mathilda of some one opening a door she wanted to go through.

"Well, I don't know," he went on, slowly. "I suppose that Ellen is a fixture anyhow, and young cubs are more likely to fall in love with a really beautiful Cinderella than just a handsome cousin. That is if the child is beautiful. How on earth can you tell anything about them at that age?"

"You can tell the day after they are born," snapped back Mrs. Seymour. "I would venture to sit down and write the lives of your two sons

to-day, and I shouldn't be far from the truth, barring death and accidents."

"So?" he asked, "and have I anything to fear?"

"Oh, no, they'll come back to the fold, even as you did!"

Her look was one of benevolent sarcasm and he grinned. There were many things worse to remember than the pretty women of his younger days. But he had come back to the fold . . . that was true, and it was not so pleasant after all. Change would be kind. He reached over and touched the blond head of his boy, who was sitting on the tiles now at his feet.

"Poor old Rob, she's got you catalogued," he said, and the talk of adoption stopped. Neither of them had taken it seriously—Jennie, unmentioned, remained insurmountable. But Mathilda had entered her wedge, without an effort. Being intensely feminine, circumstances moved toward her, not she toward them, an achievement that resulted from indicating definitely first, then vaguely opposing, everything she wanted.

Blaydon lifted his boy to his shoulder and walked through the house to the drawing room windows. He talked little more than monosyllabically to his children and had a great way of stilling their excited glee, when he wanted to, by the tone of his voice. As they stood at the window he wished that his gaze could go on over rolling

hills to the horizon. He wanted these boys to grow up with horses and vigorous sports; to see them framed against green earth and wide skies. He wanted them to draw in their early appreciations from the bare soil of their own land. Somehow that now appeared to him a spiritual necessity of which he had had too little himself, and it was the leading ambition that possessed him after a life of sophisticated pleasure.

A week later Mrs. Blaydon died. It was as though the new direction of their thoughts had penetrated to her intuitively and left her without strength to battle further.

It was not long before Blaydon felt free to go ahead with his plans. But the speed with which Mathilda proceeded to execute hers surprised and even shocked him. She did not go directly to Ellen. Instead she consulted Dr. Schottman, and readily gained his partisanship. It was from Schottman that Ellen first heard of Aunt Mathilda's intentions toward Moira. . . .

For the life of her she could not tell at first whether she was happy or miserable at the suggestion. In one moment she rejoiced over the good fortune of her daughter; in the next she experienced a sense of terrible deprivation and loneliness. She was not so sentimental as to minimize the extent of her renunciation—to hope that some crumbs from the table of Moira's affection would fall to her. It meant a thorough transfer of par-

enthood and a ruthless blotting out of the truth. One of Mrs. Seymour's reasons for adopting the child at once, as she explained to Schottman, was that the boys were young enough to grow up none the wiser. Ellen did not deceive herself. Moira would never know her, never think of her except as a servant.

She recalled sorrowfully the two happy prospects she had brought with her into that house, "Moira will love me when she is grown up, and we will do so many nice things together," and "Who knows, some day Moira may have a father. . . ." But Moira would never have a real father now through her, and Moira would never love her in the sense she had meant. A gleam of comfort crept in the chinks of her hopeless speculation.

"If Moira should learn about this, much, much later—years later when it could do no harm—about how I have given her up, she would love me all the more!"

But the stray gleam crept out at once, leaving her mind darker than before. Moira would never know, never understand anything of all she had gone through. She buried her face in the pillow. In the middle of the night she suddenly started up, feeling frantically about the room for she knew not what. Was it affection, love, just the touch of something familiar? For Moira, of course . . . but what a fool! Moira was gone,

even the crib was gone. She was alone, absolutely alone, for the rest of her life.

As she stumbled back to her bed, her hand encountered the big volume of "Les Misérables." She caught it up and held it to her breast. The book had grown to be a symbol for her of their life together in fabulous years to come. Now those years were dead. The book was no longer necessary, no longer had any meaning. . . . Ellen put it away in one of the drawers of her bureau. She would never have to read in its pages again. It would be better if she did not, better that the gulf between them should widen rather than diminish.

IX

It is four o'clock of a September afternoon and brightly still. Over on the clean rolling golf course tiny figures in all combinations of white and grey and brown move like insects soundlessly from one point to another making odd motions. Even the jays which have been haggling and shrieking all day are quiet. An occasional tree-toad or katydid creaks from the false dusk of the Eastern woods. Locusts drone, and from a long way off comes the faint click of a reaping machine at intervals, but all these sounds only accentuate the silence. An eternal, slow-breathing calm rests upon the tree tops waiting patiently for the cold of autumn.

With a murmur that grows into a rumble the stillness is broken by a monstrous motor truck which swerves into the driveway from the road a quarter of a mile away and comes tumbling down the white track, its racket increasing with its nearness. The driver noisily shunts his gears at the kitchen door, and Ellen Sydney comes out to superintend the unloading and disposition of supplies. This done and the truckman sent away with a laugh, she strolls into the garden on that side of the house and is presently at work with a

pair of shears snipping asters and marigolds for the table. There are many of them, so many they must be gathered in profusion. She has the air of one who is at home among the beds, who has worked on them and cherished them with her own hands.

She is a handsomer woman than before. Her figure has decidedly taken on dignity, and the colour of her face is a healthy brown pink. Her cheeks, thanks to the best skill of the Blaydon dentist, have lost their sunken hollows and her eyes have deepened from the effect of well-being and contented activity. She bears herself with some authority too, having taken a favoured place in her division of the housework. Her hair is greying very slightly over the ears and temples, but her step is as quick and her back as straight as a girl's. She wears a blue uniform with sleeves rolled up and a white apron.

As she reaches the entrance portico, her arms overflowing with the yellow and brown and purple flowers, a little girl of six or so with dark hair bursts from the screen door.

"Ellney, Ellney. Give me a cookie. I'm hungry."

"Can't you wait till dinner, Miss Moira? Your mother wouldn't like it."

"Oh, what's one cookie? *Maman* won't mind just one."

"She will if she finds out, and if you don't eat

your dinner. It's me that will get the lecture, not you!''—and with a look backward into the past, Ellen thinks of a boy who was once always asking for something to eat. The boy's face has so dimmed in her mind now that if there is a resemblance she does not notice it.

''*Maman* shan't lecture you, Ellney. I shan't ever let her lecture you.''

Ellen laughs, not only at what Moira says, but at the way she says it. She cannot ever get over the fact that her own child—who is now no longer her child—speaks the King's English quite as carefully as her well-bred elders, and has adopted an air of superiority in her own right. But in Ellen's laughter there is no ridicule. It is the sheer pleasure of maternal pride. Does not Moira, they say, speak French almost as well as English?

''You little darling,'' she cries, stooping and endeavouring to take the child's hand in spite of her overflowing burden, ''I'll give you just one.''

''No, two, Ellney—but one is for Hal, on my word. Isn't it funny, he's afraid to ask!''

Ellen thought there never had been a child whose laughter was more like everything good and who laughed more often than Moira. . . .

Turning in from the Marquette road to Sterling Blaydon's new country house, ''Thornhill'' as they called it, a visitor with a sculptor's eye might

describe the formation of the land as the huge thigh of a woman, resting horizontally on the earth. The private driveway ran along the crest which sloped on both sides downward to gentle valleys, while the whole ridge tapered in width gradually to a round end or knee on which rested the house in a semicircle of green. Beyond the house lay a few hundred feet of clipped lawn and well spaced trees, and then the Titan calf plunged into the earth, its declivitous sides covered with exposed rock and a thick undergrowth of every imaginable scrub and bramble, with a plentiful scattering of dogwood and plumb and thorn. It was holy with blossoms in the Spring, beginning with the ghostly shad-bush. The edge of the hill overlooked a broad meadow fifty yards below, as flat as a lake.

Spread out in three directions from this crowning point lay Blaydon's land, perhaps a third of it in rocky knolls and wood, and the remainder under cultivation by tenant farmers. The driveway to the site led almost due west but the axis of the house itself, which was narrow and long despite its irregularities, turned toward the south. It was built to the shingle eaves of rubble-rock and dominated at either end by two enormous chimneys of the same gorgeous, parti-coloured material, all of which had been found on the place. Broad verandahs, a wide, tiled terrace reached by French windows; a quaint Dutch Colonial door

and portico facing the road; screened balconies skilfully masked by the eaves; the great living and dining rooms and library which took up almost all of the lower floor; the correspondingly spacious chambers overhead, attested its inhabitants' means and love of comfort. The entrance lawn and slopes to the north were laid out in series of irregular, charming gardens. On the southeast the hill descended almost horizontally from the tiled and parapeted terrace near the house, so that from the living room windows one looked through the tops of trees to the Country Club on another hill less than a mile away.

With greater spaces had come more movement, more things to be interested in, more excitement and sound, all of which Ellen had welcomed. She meddled in everything. She had become a creditable sub-assistant gardener and something of a bee-keeper, having watched the professionals at work. The four dogs were her especial care. Two were morbidly shy collies called "Count" and "Countess" by Mathilda, and Ellen won the privilege of touching their magnificent coats and standing by while they fed, only after many months of gentleness and coaxing. They seldom allowed the other members of the household to come near them and ran wild in the woods. On the other hand the beagle and setter were almost annoyingly chummy. The animals in the stable had their daily histories also, which con-

cerned her intimately. She was a splendid milker in emergencies and would have liked to keep fowls, but this Mathilda, who respected sleep in the mornings, would not permit.

Of the two boys in the house, Hal, nine and a half, was the keener-witted and the more attractive. He was already at home among the horses and rode bare-back as well as in the saddle. She often felt sorry for Rob, who was left behind much of the time by his older brother and the swift, tiny Moira, but she did not humour him as much as she did Hal.

It was Hal, however, who had ridden a cow so successfully one day that Moira pleaded to be helped up herself, and whether the beast thought her a less formidable antagonist, or was frightened by her skirts, the little girl was thrown off and severely jolted. Hal supported her into the house, himself more frightened than she, and vowed to his aunt solemnly that from that day he would never lead her into danger again, and if she got into it he would get her out. Yet she and the boy quarrelled too and sometimes went for days without speaking. Moira would take up with Rob then, scheming with all her mind to devise adventures that would make his brother envious. She often succeeded in these stratagems, until a time came when he did not concern himself with her at all, being grown beyond little girls.

The elaborate arrangements which had been

made for Moira from the first, and the increasing complexity of the child's education, which had been undertaken very early by Mrs. Seymour, made it easier for Ellen to regard her as a member of the Blaydon family. It was only when Moira misbehaved within her knowledge or in her sight, that the true mother felt it hard to play her neutral rôle. While Moira was good she was a Seymour, naturally, but when she was bad she seemed to Ellen to be wholly her own. Ellen's impulse then, in spite of the habit of suppression, was to correct her as a mother would.

When these occasions had passed and she could reflect back on them, she thought it a blessing that Moira's correction was in the hands of others than herself. One instance of Mrs. Seymour's wise manner of dealing with unusual conduct filled her mind with wonder and created for her almost a new conception of life.

Aunt Mathilda was consulting with her in the kitchen when Moira burst in and cried:

"*Maman,* oh, *Maman,* the calf came right out of the cow! I saw it. I did."

The child's face was a study. She did not apparently know whether to be very grave, or a little frightened or to laugh, and in one who was so rarely puzzled it would have seemed pathetic had her sudden announcement been less shocking than it was. As they learned afterward, she had witnessed the birth, by sheer accident, while in

the stables with Harvey. Ellen blushed scarlet and was on the point of exclaiming indignantly, but Mrs. Seymour checked her with a gesture and took the child in her lap. Then she said in a tone the most natural in the world:

"Why, certainly, my dear. That is what happens when all animals are born, and people too. First we are carried in our mothers. Then we walk by ourselves, just as the calf will in a day or two. Now you won't ever forget that, will you?"

Beginning the middle of September and for eight months each year, Miss Cheyney, the governess, came every morning at nine, and quiet reigned while she went over the lessons with the three children shut up in the library. After luncheon, Eberhard, the man, took her back by motor to the train as he had brought her.

Ellen was always glad to see her visits begin, not only because Miss Cheyney was very democratic and "nice" to her, and proud of Moira's progress, but because they ushered in the Fall. She loved the glorious colours that spread out in widening and deepening hues over the wooded hills, until all the world seemed to have put on a flaming cloak. She and the children would fill the house with sumach and maple branches then. And when the men began bringing up the heavy logs that had lain drying in the woods all summer and sawing and splitting them for the fireplaces in the house, she could see in anticipation

the flames leaping in the chimney and hear the crackling of the wood in the fierce heat, and watch the glow of dancing light on the children's faces. She had not seen open fireplaces since the New Orleans days, when they were lighted only for a few weeks in the year; and never had she seen anything to compare with the one in the Blaydon living room which was so high a woman could stand in it while she cleaned.

And then the parties began. There were nearly always two big ones each Winter, and between them a constant stream of dinners and late motor parties, and informal crowds who tramped over from the Club to dance. Ellen loved to hear the music going at full tilt, the new jazz music that was just coming in. She didn't mind, as much as she should have, the young men getting tipsy. She was thrilled to watch the couples disappear down through the trees, laughing and chatting, eager to escape the floods of light that poured from every window in the house; or slip into their motors for a drive along the dark roads.

She had always thought of Sterling Blaydon as a reserved and serious man, and she wondered how he stood so much excitement. Then she realized that she was dealing with a new Sterling Blaydon, who not only stood it but encouraged it. His pride in the place and his love of filling it with people was like a boy's.

A great part of the pleasure she took in these

affairs arose from the fact that her daughter was a favourite. Tall, important men and dazzling young women were attentive to Moira and Moira enjoyed it as much as they did. She was growing extraordinarily self-possessed, particularly with her elders. Often enough the frank equality she adopted toward them made Ellen gasp.

Only in the dead of winter, when the snow piled up a foot or two everywhere and the drifts sometimes were up to a man's middle, would they be without company for many days at a time. During this brief closed season—for it did not last long at the worst—Mr. Blaydon usually lived in town, and sometimes Mrs. Seymour would join him there, when engagements came in bunches or the theatres were particularly interesting. And the children, freed from their teacher, would be idle.

Coming upon Moira alone at such times, with her constituted guardians away and out of mind, Ellen experienced her moments of gravest temptation. How she longed then to take the youngster in her arms and pour out the floods of love pent up within her. These yearnings were made all the more unbearable by the simple affection with which she was nearly always greeted by her daughter; yet at the same time the child's own attitude strengthened her resistance. For Ellen stood in awe of her. The force of training, the sedulously cultivated point of view, the entirely

different environment had already stamped her with the mark of another caste. Ellen could not look upon her for more than an instant as simply the object of possessive human feeling. It would sweep over her at some childlike expression, some quaint, serious look. It would be checked by some unlooked for sophistication of gesture or remark.

Moira familiarly uttered the names of grown young men who to Ellen were no more than shadows from an upper world, coldly courteous ghosts who did not see her even when they looked at her. Every season the little girl extended her interests and knowledge into a wider world and grew more alien. And gradually as the years flew by even the servants who had been in the old Trezevant place when they came there, and who somehow seemed to preserve for her, by their presence, the actuality of her motherhood, passed, until there was not one left. Gina, whose sympathy she had felt most keenly, though the sprightly Italian said nothing, was the last. And Gina went away to be married. . . .

X

To be nearly sixteen; to have a great room all to oneself, with high windows that looked upon surfs of close, glittering, talkative leaves, and hills far off between them; to have a small library of one's favourite books, and a whole corner of the room devoted to the paraphernalia of one's dearest hobby, which was painting; to have a square high bed, covered with a tester, and a wonderful, many-shelved Sheraton table beside it, and candles in old green brass candlesticks; to have a row of white, built-in armoires full of pretty dresses and cloaks and shoes; to have all this and to know one has helped to create it, was to possess a shrine where the thoughts of girlhood might safely let themselves go to all the four winds of the imagination, like many-coloured birds set free, unmindful of the traps and huntsmen scouring the world beyond.

But Moira's real favourite was not the lovely golden brown tapestry, nor the stained little bas relief of the Child, nor even the drawings of Michelangelo and Rembrandt, but a painting hung on the wall facing the foot of her bed, where she could look at it the first thing in the morning as she rose, and the last thing at night as she retired. It was a portrait of Mathilda's grand-

mother at eighteen, painted in Virginia, a year before she crossed the plains with her young husband. The smooth, dark red hair was parted and drawn about the head above the ears like a cap, its gleam of colour apparent only in the gloss of the high lights. The blue eyes and fresh complexion and fine, regular features were done with infinite tenderness. She sat in a black gown, opening wide at the neck, against a red background formed by a cloak thrown over the chair. Moira knew it was good painting, of an exquisite older style, though the name of the painter was unsigned and had long been forgotten. She amused herself making little verses about it.

"My young great grandmother sits in her frame
And the red of her cloak burns warm as a flame . . ."

Many a time she sat up in her bed pretending to have conversations about the stirring adventures of her grandmother's early days, for she had heard the whole story of the young woman's arduous journey and home-building—and also about the young men who came to Thornhill, discussing their characters without reserve. One could do this in perfect propriety with a dead great grandmother.

"Tommy McNutt wants to come over every day and ride with me, Grandmother. But he squints out of doors, and he always wants to help you on

a horse and he talks like a newspaper piece. I'd rather have somebody to talk to like old George Moore, wouldn't you, dear? It's a pity you were born too early to read George Moore. I know you would like him''—and she broke off for rhyme again:

"The courtly old painter I am sure wore lace
And the things he said brought a flush to her face."

"But if I should like Tommy I'd have a whole house as big as this one all my own. And if I should like Mark Sturm, the young brewer, I'd have two. . . . I don't care, *Maman* will give me a house."

"Then there's Selden Van Nostrand. He's tremendously popular because he makes up verses about 'Aphrodite in a nightie,' but he sometimes does better than that. The other day he said his heart was a leaf devoured by the worm of Egotism, shrivelled in the fire of Sex, and trampled by the feet of Virtue. I see you like that one, Grandma. Beautiful Grandma, I have your eyes—

"Her wide blue eyes have a trace of play
And the day she sat was a fine bright day!"

Moira finished her morning cup of tea on the stand beside the bed and recalled suddenly that this fine, bright day was one of special signifi-

cance, for Hal was coming home from his last year at prep school. Hal was the one young man she never talked to her great grandmother about, because, as she explained to herself, she was his great grandmother also and would be prejudiced. She stood in the sunlight pouring through the window, watching it gleam upon her firm shoulders and flanks. She had not decided whether she would go to the station with her mother and Uncle Sterling or not.

Hal had treated her pretty badly the summer before and been very satirical, and the worst of it was she had found it hard to resent because he had seemed suddenly to be much older and to have some right to authority. He had been nicer at Christmas, taking her to two parties and giving her a set of Verlaine bound in tooled leather, but even when he tried to be nice to her he had somehow seemed condescending.

She was in great doubt. Nobody, of course, would attach any significance to it, whichever she did, not even Hal, probably. It was only important to herself. She knew something had happened to her during the past year that was comparable to the change in Hal the year before. She had evidence now under her hands and in her eyes as she stood undressed, evidence that did not wholly please her, for she had lately taken a fancy to dislike women. More satisfactory evidence was a sense of mental growth.

She had just returned from a long Spring vacation in New York with Mathilda, not her first visit but her most exciting one, and her thoughts were awhirl with Pavlova and Rachmaninoff and the Washington Square Players, bobbed hair and the operas at the Metropolitan, and a dozen startling, vivifying, even violent art exhibitions. She felt that she was probably much more splashed by the currents than Hal himself, for certainly one did not really learn anything at a boy's school. Such places could only be high class stables for thoroughbred colts to pass the awkward stage in, under trainers far less capable than those they would have had if they were horses.

And now the question was whether to test the glamour of these mental and physical acquisitions upon Hal by waiting to meet him alone, or to go like a good fellow and see him with the family. There was, of course, nothing personal about it; Hal was no more than an opportune judge. He represented the best criticism the East had to send back to them.

After her bath she decided for action. She would go with the others and meet him. "Any way, why attach so much importance to Hal? He's quite capable of attaching enough to himself."

There was the possibility, too, of dramatic interest in his arrival. The year before, on his re-

turn, at eighteen, he had boldly announced to his father he was going to war. There wasn't to be a day lost, he wanted to go at once. Every man in his class was going somehow or other. Sterling Blaydon opposed it, the argument dragged out for days, and finally the family won. But it was only with the understanding that if Hal would finish his last year at school he might make his own decision. The country's participation in the war was now over a year old and the outlook was dismal, one German advance after another having succeeded. There were plenty of youngsters of nineteen and twenty in it, and Hal would insist upon enlisting. He had, as a matter of fact, and as his letters showed, done almost no schooling at Fanstock that year. The entire institution had been made over into a training camp.

Moira remembered how her cousin had chafed the summer before, hating his idleness and the wretched fate of being in excessive demand to entertain girls. Her sympathy with his groans had gone a long way to help her forgive his ill treatment.

And yet she had never been worked up to a pitch of great excitement about the war.

One failing had troubled her ever since she could remember—the tendency to disagree with opinions as soon as an overwhelming majority held them.

It was partly due to the example of Mathilda's own fastidiousness and independence of judgment, but she went farther than Mathilda, and supposed that she must have inherited this inconvenient trait from that mythical father of whom she had been told so little and longed to know so much. At all events, she arrived at certain conclusions, by herself, about the war: for example, that perhaps Germany was not entirely the instigator, that cruelties were probably practised on both sides—war's horrors produced them—and that after all it did seem as though the whole world was furiously pitted against two or three caged-in nations.

She did not entirely like herself for these heresies and kept silent upon them. But she promised herself the fun of an argument with Hal. How it would irritate him!

"He'll think I've lost my mind. Perhaps he'll surrender me to the authorities. How wonderful —I wish he would!"

She took one final glimpse of herself and walked slowly out of the room to face a hard day. She felt she would prove a formidable antagonist for Hal.

But downstairs a surprise was waiting. She found Mathilda, suppressing a few tears, and her Uncle sitting in a profound study. Their disappointment communicated itself to her at once. Something had happened about Hal.

Mrs. Seymour indicated the yellow night-letter on the table.

"Dear Father and Aunt [it read]: Offered chance to join aviation training corps, Long Island, at once. No time to come home. Wish me luck enough to get over soon. Love. Hal."

Well, that was sensation enough for her. He had acted with divine independence.

The months that followed until the Armistice were dull and tragic. She would a hundred times rather have gone over herself, though it be as a rank flag-waver. It was all stupid, cunning, criminal, got up by old men to kill young ones. It would be stupid enough to take Hal, her playmate. Night after night she saw him, mutilated or dead; she got so she could picture exactly the way a small hole looked in a man's forehead, just the degree of red and blue about its tiny rim, and the relaxed, livid expression of a face that had been dead several hours. These pictures haunted her wakeful nights in many different guises, but always with Hal's features. She learned in imagination how flesh looked when it was laid open or gangrened, and the appearance of the end of a limb that had been taken off. And she grew so bitter that she found she could not pray, though she had always experienced a soothing pleasure

from the language of the Book of Common Prayer. She never said those pieces again. She would sit up suddenly in bed, as though she had been wakened by a barrage, and talk by fitful candlelight to her portrait.

XI

"And you aren't really sorry you didn't get over?"

"Sorry? Wouldn't you be?"

"Well, I don't know. Considering the hordes of disillusioned veterans I've met this winter—"

"At least they had a chance to get disillusioned in action. Something for their money. With me it's just two years—practically three years—gone to pot, and a sort of feeling it isn't worth while to go back at all. To college, I mean."

"You couldn't start this time of year, could you?"

"I suppose I could do something."

"It would be fun having you around until Fall—like old times."

Hal laughed shortly.

"You'd care?"

"I've had a good long spell of Thornhill alone, you know. Next year I shan't mind, because I'll be away at school myself."

"My Lord, Moira, have you anything more to learn?"

"Oh, yes, I could learn to be useful, for instance."

"You manage to be most anything, if the notion strikes you."

"I'm not so crazy to go," she mused. "I imagine it'll be rather awful. Formalities, lady lecturers, highbrow girls with shell-rimmed glasses. They've been cramming education down the throats of the fashionable young for a generation and what's the result? Country clubs, prohibition, and a beastly war."

"Cynical, eh?"

"No more than you would be, if you'd done nothing but read newspapers these last two years. I suppose now they'll all combine and squeeze everything out of Germany that she has left—just as the Persians and the Greeks did, and the kings in the Bible. And there'll be a lot of moralizing—more than ever. Of course, you'll be glad. The victor is always spoiled."

"Pooh," he laughed. "You've got me wrong. I don't give a damn what they do. Say, the only principles I have left are principles of horsemanship. I'm highly interested in the way you sit Elfin."

"Isn't she a beauty!"

"She's a pretty horse. But I wasn't referring entirely to the equine part of the combination."

It was the first real day they had had together since Hal's discharge from camp the week before. The weather was like an Indian summer afternoon, one of those exceedingly mild days of February between spells of stiff cold. They had been galloping along the high road, when Moira sud-

denly pulled up and turned her horse into a meandering lane, so narrow that the stripped branches met in sharply accentuated patterns overhead against the sky. The fields were a monotonous, hard stubbly brown, except where pockets of soiled snow lay in the holes and under the protecting sides of hillocks.

"Is Selden Van Nostrand coming out to-morrow?" asked Hal, after they had ridden a hundred yards in silence.

"Yes."

"Does he come out often?"

"Yes . . . let's go as far as Corey's Inn for a bite. I'm famishing, aren't you?"

"I don't like him. I suppose you know that."

"You're not going to be like the rest of the patriots, are you? Get so you despise anybody with a critical mind?"

"I admire people who say what they mean as much as anybody. But I do object to Van Nostrand, because he's faintly rotten, and even his wit is literary. He always seems to be rehearsed. Anybody can do that Wilde thing if they study up on it long enough. The point is, is it worth while?"

She laughed with a touch of malice.

"You sound like a book review, Hal. His line is pretty easy, but it's a line. Nobody ever even tries to be amusing here, and he not only tries but I think he succeeds."

"It's from him, I suppose, you got this fellow-feeling for the Germans. Well, he had plenty of opportunity to cultivate it, staying at home."

Moira gave him a glance of friendliness.

"Oh, it's such fun to have you back, I don't care what you say. If you knew all the dreams I've had, terrifying dreams, seeing you—hurt and cut up and dead. I'd wake up mad enough to kill Germans myself."

"Did you really dream about me, Moira?" He pulled his horse closer to hers, leaning as far as he could. The girl's mount, disliking to be crowded, pranced out of control, and Hal had to swerve away, but he kept his eyes on the straight, slim figure.

"God, Moira, what a beauty you've grown!"

She began to murmur aloud:

"When I was one and twenty
I heard a wise man say
Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away,
Give gold away and rubies
But keep your fancy free,
But I was one and twenty,
No use to talk to me."

"Moira!" he cried, but she was gone, at full gallop down the lane.

"Hurry!" she called back, "I'm nearly dead with hunger."

And from there to the inn was a race.

When they returned it was dark, and both were eager to reach the stables, but as they wheeled into the little pasture road which led through the tenant's land and past Hermann Dietz' house, a curious scene halted them.

The house was a very old-fashioned small wooden dwelling, with a high stone foundation, built by the past generation of Dietzes twenty-five or thirty years before. The barn, larger than the house, was some twenty yards from the kitchen door, across a squalid cow yard. A dim lamp or two was burning in the house, but this was completely deserted, the doors hanging open and giving it a half-witted grimace. The centre of attraction was a big double barn door. Around this, in a lighted semi-circle stood the Dietz family, consisting of the bony, tall, salmon-faced father, the emaciated, dreadfully stooped mother, and four children of varying ages. A curious murmur arose from the group, and riding closer, Moira and Hal saw that they were weeping. Beyond, they could catch a glimpse of the body of a horse, swaying slightly from side to side in its last agony, and casting monstrous shadows on the high cobwebbed walls behind, thrown by the lantern which stood on the ground at Hermann's feet.

Moira dismounted and signalled to Hal to follow her.

"They've been grieving this way since yester-

day,'' she whispered, ''and to-day the veterinary told them he couldn't save the horse.''

The sobs arising from the pitiful group, two of the smallest of whom clung to their mother's skirts and hid their faces, more frightened at the commotion than troubled about the horse, rose and fell with the spasms of suffering that swept over the dying beast. Moria heard Ellen's reassuring voice and saw her face for the first time in the lantern light at the far end of the group.

''Ah, Mrs. Dietz, let them put the poor animal out of its pain,'' she was saying in a loud whisper to the mother. ''It can't live.''

Moira turned to Hal and took his arm. He had been smiling grimly at the scene, but as her hand fell upon his sleeve he covered it with his own. The horse, the drama of primitive sorrow, everything was forgotten, except her features and hair, and gipsy loveliness in the wavering light.

''They're Ellen's children, these people,'' she said. ''She's wonderful to them. She told me yesterday 'that horse is like a member of their family, Miss Moira. It'll be terrible when it dies.' Isn't she fine to come down here and comfort them?''

They turned at the sound of foot-steps crossing the hard earth and stubble, and two stocky figures passed them.

''Hullo,'' said one, with a grin. It was Rob Blaydon, carrying in his hand something from

which they caught a quick gleam as he passed. The veterinary was with him. Both went up to Hermann and held a hurried consultation, and during this the family fell silent. Presently the three men parted. Hermann spoke up in a high, quavering voice.

"Well, Momma, they say it's jest got to be done. We jest got to give her up, and put her out of her misery. I don't know where we're a-goin' to git another one like her. I don't know—that I don't. Poor old Molly. She's been with us now longer than my boy there, pretty near as long as Lilly here. It breaks me up to lose her. Yes, sir, it goes hard, but there ain't no helping it."

"That's the way to look at it, Hermann," said Rob, with gruff good nature.

Hal raised his voice from where he stood with Moira at some distance.

"I'll give you another horse, Dietz," he said. Moira squeezed his arm.

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Hal," the farmer responded, obsequiously, peering for him in the weak light. "Now, Momma, ain't that fine! Well, children, I guess we better be movin' in. Poor Molly—I'd rather not see you do it, gentlemen, if you don't mind."

The family turned to obey, exhibiting a variety of expressions, from fright to the deepest woe, but Moira observed that there was one who had not shared the general grief—the short, mature,

straw-haired girl of sixteen or seventeen, whose face bore a stolid, disdainful look. She followed toward the kitchen after Ellen and one of the small children, but as she reached the porch she turned and gazed at Rob Blaydon, fascinated by the revolver in his hand. In the weird light, which cast a romantic glow over her figure and uncouth clothing, Moira thought the girl had a touch of beauty, fresh and coarse and natural as earth.

"Poor Hermann," she said, "he's a rustic Pierrot, Hal."

Just as they topped the ridge they heard the harsh double-fire of Rob Blaydon's revolver. She was glad to see the lights of Thornhill.

"Well," said Hal, "Rob had a good hunch tonight—even if it was fun for him. Just the sort of thing he'd love. There's the boy who needed to go to France. As it is he'll get over that raw streak very slowly."

"Rob's a dear," she broke in, earnestly. "I'm not one of those who worry about him. He's a good animal—without a shred of theory in him. I let him get me most beautifully pickled twice last Fall."

"The devil you did!" exclaimed Hal.

"Why not? He knows everybody everywhere and they like him. And he drives like a wild man—when he's had a few. Now you wouldn't be such a good fellow, would you, Hal? You'd be

cautious and look after my morals, and count my drinks and take me home early."

"Yes, I'm afraid I would," he said. "And I suppose you wouldn't like it."

XII

It was Ellen's night off and after the dispatching of the horse, she stayed with Mrs. Dietz to cheer her up and help put the two youngest children to bed. She had been so long a constant visitor and benefactor that they had ceased to regard her as an emissary from the big house and talked of their troubles freely before her.

The five of them sat about the lamp in the comfortless but warm living room of the farmhouse, listening to a monologue by Hermann Dietz on the virtues of the dead horse. Although he had been born within a hundred feet of that spot, and his father had come to America as a boy, Dietz' accent, like many of his kind bred to the farms thereabouts, still bore traces of the German. They were a squatter-like tribe, never prosperous.

"Poor old Molly, she was not so old, yet, but it seemed like we had had her always, Mrs. Williams. She did her share, Molly."

"What did Mr. Robert do to Molly?" asked the boy, plaintively. "Did he shoot her? Can I go see?"

"No, no, you wait until morning. Don't you mind about Molly. She was sufferin' terrible, and she's better where she is. But we'll miss her.

Yes, Johnnie, when you was a little bit of a feller, two, three years old, Poppa used to put you on Molly's back and hold you, and you'd laugh and holler and she'd walk so easy just as if she knew you was a baby."

"Things was different in them days," piped his wife. "Them automobile horns, now. We didn't never used to hear them. But nowadays it's half the night, Mrs. Williams. I can't get used to 'em. They keep me awake so."

"Ah, they wouldn't be so bad," put in the girl Lilly, "if we could ride in 'em now an' then, the way others do. Johann Hunker's got a m'chine."

"Ach, you are always bellerin' about a m'chine," her father burst out. "When you got one you got a hole to throw money in. Listen to them rich people even, talkin' about how much they cost. What have I got to do with a m'chine? An' whose goin' to run it, your Momma? I ain't goin' to take no risks with 'em, not since I got that sunstroke last August anyways. I git so dizzy sometimes I think I can't get home to the house."

"I could run it," grumbled Lilly.

"You now, Lilly! You've got plenty to do without that. You don't tend to your work the way it is."

"She's gettin' so lazy she's got no head to remember anything," put in her mother. "I don't dare leave the children with her."

"M'chine!" Dietz quavered on, "I ain't got no money for 'em if I wanted one."

"You've got the money, I guess," said Mrs. Dietz querulously, "the same as Johann Hunker, if you wanted to spend it."

"Now, Momma, I told you twenty times already I'm takin' care of your money. Who's goin' to keep it safe for a rainy day, if it ain't me?"

"Well, we don't see anything of it, Hermann, not since you got hold of it . . . sellin' off the farms, an' leavin' us with hardly a place to put foot to the ground."

"Yes, Momma," rejoined her husband earnestly. "I did sell off the farms. But you know what Mr. McNutt said. He said if I didn't want to take that two hundred dollars an acre Mr. Blaydon offered, they'd all go somewheres else an' build, and our land never would git a high price. You couldn't git a hundred for it in them days."

"There's some of them waited longer an' got more. Johann Hunker did."

"Johann Hunker may be a slick feller, but if I hadn't sold when I did they mightn't have come here at all, an' then where would Johann Hunker be? Never you mind about that money. It's a-drawin' good interest."

Dietz lifted his tall, bent form from his chair and shuffled over to the stove to dump his pipe.

Then he turned again to his wife, a sudden grin spreading over his cheeks.

"Well, Momma, what about a little wine? Seeing Mrs. Williams is here, eh? A little home-made wine and coffee cake. We'll give the childern some wine to-night, eh? Lilly, bring up the chairs to the table."

The girl rose languidly to obey and Mrs. Dietz departed for the bedroom, returning a moment later with a long bottle. Lilly brought glasses and placed them on the red-figured table cover.

"Get the coffee cake, Lilly," her mother ordered.

Dietz toyed affectionately with the stem of his glass filled with bright red liquid.

"Ach, the home-made wine—that is good! Well, it is like old times, Momma—when the older children, Lena and Fred was here, and Lilly was a little girl about Johnnie's size. Yes, it was fine then. None of these rich people with big houses and all that. We was the bosses then."

"We had all the land," put in Mrs. Dietz gloomily. "We could get enough off of it to sell a good crop every year and plenty of vegetables to the commission men, and you always had money, if you needed it for anything, like Molly dying. Now it's in the bank and we can't spend nothing. No, the land was better than the money."

"Mr. Blaydon, he gives me sixty dollars a

month, and all the feed for the stock, and half the money from the truck. That is something, sixty dollars sure every month."

"But you've got to work for Mr. Blaydon, and I do, and even the childern. It ain't the same as when we worked for ourselves."

"Poppa," broke in Lilly, as she cut the long flat sections of coffee cake, "Mary Hunker was selling some of Johann's wine over at Corey's last week. She got a big price, enough to buy a new dress. Can I sell some of Momma's wine? We can't ever drink up what we got every year."

"Ach Himmel!" Dietz cried, bringing his glass down with a rattle upon the table. "There is that girl. We have the land and sell that. We have the wine and we got to sell that too. Ain't there nothing we can call our own? No, Lilly, you let the wine be."

"I never get clothes at all like the Hunker girls," she replied sullenly. "I saw a green dress, a pretty one, over at town that was only thirteen dollars and fifty cents."

"But, Lilly, your sister Lena never bought no dresses for thirteen dollars and fifty cents. And Lena always looked nice. She married a man with a fine bakery business on Oak Street. He took Lena already because she was a neat, sensible girl and wouldn't throw away his money for him. I don't know what to think of you, Lilly. A honest, Christian girl, the way you've been brought

up. You ain't like your sister, is she, Momma?"

"You wouldn't expect all girls would be alike, Hermann," said her mother. "Lilly is a good girl, but times have changed since Lena was her age. You give me the money, now, and I'll go with her to look at the dress."

"Well, well, I guess so," replied Hermann, mollified by his wife's firmness. "That is a lot of money, but Lilly is a pretty girl, eh? I'll give you the money to-morrow and maybe you can buy the dress before Sunday. Then them Hunker girls won't be so fresh up at church."

"Pour some more wine for Mrs. Williams, Lilly," said Mrs. Dietz.

"No," said Ellen, "I must be going."

"Yes, a night cap, Mrs. Williams," said Dietz, in his best manner. "A little more wine for all of us, and then we'll go to bed. I got to get Meyer, if I can, or Ed Becker, to help me bury poor Molly to-morrow. You got to dig a big hole for a horse."

As Ellen left the cottage and started homeward she did not know whether to laugh or cry. It was always the same story, poverty and hard work, and the vanity of the young girl tempted as she had been most of her life by the strange, glamorous panorama of the rich at her very doorstep. And she had not the sense of pride the older folks had enjoyed, the knowledge of having been masters of the neighbourhood. Mrs. Dietz' remark

haunted her mind. "The land was better than the money." For such as these people, it was. It had given them all they had, all they could possibly have, to live for.

The shortest path up the hill to the Blaydon house was rocky and steep, and a third the way up Ellen stopped for breath and regretted she had not walked around the longer way. It was dark under the trees and hard to stick to the path. She sat down to remove a pebble from her low shoe. As she stood up again facing the foot of the hill, she could see a broad patch of Dietz' field through an opening in the branches. At that moment a figure stepped out from the trees into the open space and came to a stop as if waiting. It was a man undoubtedly, she thought, but she was curious to make sure. So few prowlers ever disturbed the peace of the place. She crept down the path, holding on to the shrubs and tree-trunks and making as little noise as possible. She decided she would wait until the man moved on and go around by the road after all. Reaching the bottom she found herself within a few yards of Rob Blaydon. A moment later, nearer the already dark and silent Dietz house, she saw another figure stirring. What could Rob be up to and who was his confederate? Then swiftly, Lilly darted from the shadow of the house and joined him. The two disappeared, exchanging whispers, around the side of the hill.

Ellen started impulsively, as though she would stop them, but she did not go far. What could she do? She knew Rob Blaydon too well to think that he would take any interference from her or from any inferior. He was not a mean boy, but he was headstrong. He would tell her that he thought her a busybody and a nuisance. And supposing she went to Lilly? Lilly would be frightened and cowed for the moment. But Ellen realized, far more sharply than the girl's family, how deep her rebellion lay. In the end she would throw advice to the winds.

There was left the alternative of warning Mathilda or Sterling Blaydon. If she did so what could she prove? Rob was bold enough to make the thing appear in any light he desired, some boyish escapade in which he had inveigled the girl to join. To excite the Dietz family about the girl's danger was as useless. They could not control her in any case, and it might fire her to desperate measures. Ellen could do nothing that would result in any good, nothing except create a scandal.

She sat down and wondered if she cared. She certainly cared about the child's welfare, but now that she felt it was impossible to prevent what was happening, she could reason about it calmly. Life was a dreadfully sad thing any way you took it. But could this love affair do the girl more harm than she was sure to meet with in any event —perhaps at the hands of worse men? Might it

not come to mean something to her she would cherish despite its cost? Ellen's only answer to these questions was her own experience. Perhaps it had been worth while. Her daughter was happy, with an unclouded future, and she was contented. Knowledge of herself had suddenly shaken her faith in the creed that one must inevitably suffer pain because of sin.

XIII

From the house far above them came the indistinct sound of Mathilda at the piano. Was it "*Reflets dans l'eau*" she was playing? As the music stopped the chaotic noises of life took up their endless staccato rhythm—cows lowing in the pasture, a workman calling to another, the beat of a hammer in some farmhouse, the restless twitter and trilling of birds, the snapping and stirring of branches, a motorhorn sounding a thousand miles away, it seemed—the music of the universe that was flowing through her now in a full stream. Moira opened her book at random:

"Leave go my hands, let me catch breath and see;
Let the dew-fall drench either side of me;
Clear apple leaves are soft upon that moon
Seen side-wise like a blossom in the tree;
Ah God, ah God, that day should come so soon . . .

She stopped and looked off through the leaves to the wide fields where the sun lay.

"Don't you love it, Hal," she said, "just the sound of it, the perverse beauty of it? Is there anything more wonderful?"

Hal rolled over upon the flat of his back staring thoughtfully up from the shady chamber of green,

the tiny grotto at the cliff-foot, up at the grey old overhanging boulders, like moles and maculations on the brow of an ancient crone, the massy tangle of branches and leaves bursting from among them and cutting off half his vision of the glittering blue heaven, wherein floated great flocks of clouds as artificial in their sheer whiteness and hard outlines as puff-balls on a pool. His muscular brown arms and neck were bare to the white bathing shirt. His bright blonde hair was tousled over his face, which was mature and strong. The girl's voice made little ripples of pleasure run over his limbs; it gave the words a significance which would never have reached him without her—

"The grass is thick and cool, it lets us lie,
Kissed upon either cheek and either eye.
I turn to thee as some green afternoon
Turns toward sunset and is loth to die;
Ah God, ah God, that day should come so soon."

That certainly he could feel supremely, experience in himself. He let his gaze rest upon her. The fine black hair, bobbed at last in spite of Aunt Mathilda's anxious objections, made a quaint pattern on the face. Against it the glow of her skin and lips was the more brilliant by contrast, and beneath the white angle of brow, the eyes, looking suddenly at him from the page, were as clear, cool, vivid blue as violets in a snowbank.

There was in that face the necessary balance between strength and frailty, self-possession and emotion, at least, so he thought, the features not quite absolutely regular. He preferred that touch of oddness; it was the stamp of her will, her curious insights, her traits of unusual justice. It mitigated too much beauty. Greek models were all very well in statues, but in a woman one wanted a lively difference. . . . Moira's book suddenly snapped shut, as though his slowly relished inspection were too much for her. Her short laugh came like a chain of melody from her whole body.

"Poor Hal," she cried, "aren't you sorry you will have to listen to Swinburne all your life?"

He reached out an Indian forearm and drew her to him. They were silent for a long time. Then she sat back, her eyes admiring the relaxed strength of his body.

"God!" he muttered, "and I once thought because we were cousins this could never happen—I should never be allowed to speak."

"Such a good little boy," she said. "You would have waited to be allowed."

"It's odd how I've never been able to think of you as Aunt's daughter."

"Neither have I," she replied. "But it is easy to explain. It takes a man—a father—about the house to establish parentage. Mother is a dilettante on her job, anyway. But I have some quali-

ties from her, I know. . . . What *was* father like?''

''I wasn't exactly his playmate, you know!'' he laughed. ''I don't remember him any more than you do. But he must have been a regular, from all I've heard. He was your father, all right.''

''H'm. . . . Ned Seymour *sounds* like a man who might be my father. And names are wonderful—better than portraits—to read people by. I can't tell much by father's looks. Poor Daddy, *Maman* stood by him, I'm glad of that. She's always been a heretic among her own. But if Daddy was so ambitious, so indifferent to the world and all that, why didn't he leave me a sign, why didn't he leave glorious works? He should have.''

''He left you,'' laughed Hal.

''The work of an idle moment.''

''Aren't they the best? But I rather like that about your father, the fact that he was a spectator rather than a spouter. So many darned people aren't content with their limitations. They have to puddle about with paint and ink.''

''As I do.''

''It's yours by right, I suppose. At least, you really like it.''

''I have invented a litany, Hal. Will you listen to it? I invented it for the saddest people in the world. It goes like this: O God, be merciful to those who are free and must live with the fettered; to the scornful laughers who are bound to the hu-

mourless; to the swift who walk by the slow; and the idle who are bondsmen to the busy—and especially, O God, be merciful to all those whose spirits were young and whose generation denied them youth's chance, amen. There must have been many like Daddy in his day."

Through the trees the half moon glowed like the polished end of a woman's nail against a pink and sapphire West. It was an infinitely tender moment, the end of a week of betrothal, the eve of his departure for a trip North.

"Let me, please, once more," whispered Moira, "one I love." And she quoted:

"La lune blanche
Luit dans les bois,
De chaque branche
Parte une voix,
Sous la ramée,
Oh, bien-aïmée.

"Une vaste et tendre
Apaisement
Semble descendre
Du firmament
Que l'astre irise . . .
C'est l'heure exquise!"

"You gave me those," she said. "They were a peace offering one Christmas, one year you had treated me very badly. I love them because they

are all young, all fresh, ageless. Let's you and I, dear, resolve to be young forever. Let's make a bond of youth, cherish it, study to keep it, never let it go."

"Moira, you will never be older than this day."

"I think it is easy to stay young if one keeps one's unreasonable likes. One should always like things that are a little twisted and strange, in spite of what people think. One must like Verlaine's absinthe as well as Verlaine, Swinburne and Swinburne's perversity also, Rob and his wickedness—the wickedness he doesn't understand. You know, Hal, I didn't go to college after all, because I was afraid it would make me old, it would give me 'interests.' I hate the word. As if everything wasn't an interest!"

They walked around by the flat, broad meadow, hushed in the dusk. The first whip-poor-will was calling. She clung to his arm, enjoying the sensation of firm muscles flexing under her hand.

"I don't care," she cried. "I'm not afraid of anything. I would as soon give myself to you, all of me, now, to-night. The rest, all the fuss, does not count. What is there to fear in this glorious wide world, Hal?"

"Nothing—but fear, I suppose," he replied.

Two white figures swaying together across the dusty furrows, they merged into the darkness like birds fluttering out of sight in the clouds.

XIV

Moira had considered Mathilda not at all in the swift, sudden, almost cyclonic romance with Hal Blaydon, no more indeed than in any of her flirtations. There had been many others, of all ages, from her own up to fifty, and she had vaguely realized that when her choice was made, if she made a choice, her mother would have to be counted in. At times during the past week of incredible magic, she had feared the possibility of a clash between them, owing to the good Episcopalian views, to which Mathilda still clung, despite the advanced and advancing habits of thought that surrounded her. But the logic with which the girl faced this possibility was serene: harmony had always prevailed between them, too much harmony perhaps, and some conflict was inevitable sooner or later. It had better occur over this biggest and most important choice of her youth.

She had begun to wonder, of late, just how she felt toward her mother. Certainly she was very fond of her, but it seemed hardly a filial fondness. She admired Mathilda's little fantasticalities; it was clear that she had in her time been something of an idol-breaker; but it was equally clear that her cherished image of herself as a person of

great independence of mind was somewhat outworn. The daughter had gone far beyond the older woman, or so she thought, and there lurked small matters on which they concealed their opinions from each other. Moreover, Moira had loved her most for the brightness and charm of her manner and these were becoming clouded by a new development that touched her closely—a secret in her brother's life. Mathilda had discovered the truth with amazement, but to all appearances had reconciled herself to it. So long, she argued, as the apartment he kept in town remained only a rendezvous for discreet meetings, she did not greatly care. But more and more this other establishment was taking Blaydon away from them. Could her brother possibly bring himself to marry the woman—not now perhaps—but when age had weakened his resistance and laid him open to appeals to sentiment and protection? He was already far from a young man. . . . It was a situation that had a profound effect upon her accustomed poise, because it was one which she could not influence nor even speak of in his presence.

After Hal had left on his trip that night, Moira put up her car—she had driven him to the station herself—and walked into the library. She found Mathilda embroidering, a pastime in which she was skilful, and took a frank pride. It was her substitute for artistic expression, as she said, a

gift she had always honestly envied. Everybody they knew, Moira thought, longed for artistic expression—and Hal had been right to scorn it. There were Mary Cawthorn and Tempe Riddle—as soon as people like that had taken up writing verse, she herself had dropped it. She had turned exclusively to her painting. That, at least, you couldn't do at all, without some foreground, some knowledge and practice. She was happy that her youth had been industrious enough to bring her a measure of these. And she did not take it seriously.

"Well," said Mathilda, "you've seen your darling off?"

The girl did not attempt to conceal her surprise. Then she laughed.

"I suppose nobody could really have failed to know, who had been around the house these last few days. Still, we thought we were so clever."

"There's such a thing as being too clever. When you and Hal began to be stiff toward each other, I knew what was happening."

"We must have been a fine pair of actors."

"But I've seen it coming all along. Before either of you did, I believe."

Moira flopped upon the cricket at her mother's feet, and looked into her face affectionately.

"And that means, darling, that you don't object?"

Mathilda ran her slim hand through the short, dark curls leaning against her knee.

"Of course not, my child. It's the most perfect thing that could have happened."

"Mother," asked the girl, looking up at her whimsically, "when are we ever going to quarrel, you and I?"

"Never, I hope."

"Isn't it rather unhealthy never to quarrel? Hal and I do, frequently, and I'm glad of it."

"You won't think that way when you are my age."

"*Maman,* are you very miserable about Uncle Sterling?"

Mathilda's reply was preceded by a short pause and a quick glance.

"How did you know that?" she asked.

"I have ears and eyes—and can put things together, you know," laughed Moira. Then she added, more gravely, "I really don't think many people know. When Selden hinted about it I denied the story flatly—for his benefit."

"Why deny the truth?" It was one of Mathilda's traits to be able to say things the implications of which were unpleasant to her.

"Oh, one must to busybodies. Only I do wish you wouldn't be unhappy about it."

"I'm not," said the other, "so long as matters remain as they are."

"I see what you mean, dear. People who have professionally renounced marriage ought to have some pride. They ought to observe the ethics of their profession."

Mathilda smiled.

"I'm afraid my attitude is not so impersonal. Isn't that somewhere in Shaw?"

"It must be," replied the girl. "But I'm quite thrilled over the whole thing. Please forgive me for saying so. To think of Uncle Sterling being so delightfully biblical!"

She went to the table and brought the cigarettes. The older woman took one from her and laid aside her embroidery. "You'll do something for me, you two?" she asked.

"What?"

"Get married as soon as possible."

"Oh, my dear! I'm only nineteen."

"Do you think you would ever change?"

"No, I don't think that."

"Then why not marry? I can't understand the modern idea of waiting until life is over to marry. It's good for people to have their youth together —when they can."

"Well, Hal has done all the planning, and I think it is very sensible. In the first place, he's going on with his chemistry. He doesn't want to go into the brokerage office, and you mustn't tell Uncle yet."

"I approve of that. Brokerage will do for Robert."

"It means two more years for him at college. The first of them I shall spend in New York studying. The next I want to spend in Paris, and I want you to come with me, dear. How about it? And then—married in Paris, and the Sorbonne or some German University for Hal. Isn't that a glorious programme? He really didn't plan all of it."

"No, I imagine not," laughed Mathilda. "He would probably have planned it as I would, by beginning with the end. But I shan't oppose you. I've never opposed you much, Moira, not even when I might have done so with justice. And the reason is that I have always wanted to live to see one completely happy person. I hope you are going to be the one."

Mathilda concluded with a wistful note.

"Darling," cried the girl. "How good you have been to me. And I wonder if I am going to be completely happy. I'll try, and I shan't be ashamed or modest about it, either. Is that—egotistical?"

A few minutes later as she passed Hal Blaydon's door on the way to her own, she could not resist the temptation to go in. She had never done that before deliberately, and she felt a little like an intruder. She had a great distaste for

the practice of assuming privileges with those one cared for, but she knew he would be pleased if he saw her patting his bed affectionately and looking around at his belongings. As she stopped in front of the untidy book shelves, she smiled at their incongruous juxtaposition of textbooks, modern novels and classic survivals of adolescence—"This Side of Paradise" between a Latin grammar and a Dictionary of Physics; "Cytherea," which reminded her just then of many men she knew, alongside of "Plutarch's Lives." She reflected that she would probably not sleep very early tonight and had no fresh reading in her bedroom. She quickly pulled out a volume and went to her room.

With her clothes off and three pillows behind her back, and a cigarette between her lips, she picked up the book she had borrowed. There had been a certain degree of method in her selection. It was an old, loose-backed, green-covered copy of "Les Misérables," one of her long and growing list of "duty books," that is to say, books she ought to have read years ago and had not. This happened also to belong to the classification of "school-piece" books. An English reader had contained a selection from it, and she had once resolved, in a fit of rebellion against the academic, never to read any books that yielded school pieces for the boredom of the young. Later the con-

science of a cultivated adult had forced her to recant, and her *index librorum prohibitorum* had become an index obligatory.

The book in her hand was a long one. She would just about finish it by the time Hal came back, and that would be killing two birds with one stone.

She opened it at random and as she removed her thumbs the pages leaped back to a marked place, occupied by a letter. She picked it up. It was an old and faded letter, addressed to "Mrs. Ellen Williams, 21 Trezevant Place." That was Ellen, the cook, of course. She smiled a little at the thought of Ellen reading a monstrous book like this. She had never seen Ellen read anything except a recipe or a label. But, of course, humble people did like Hugo. She had read "Notre Dame" and "Ninety-Three."

Moira would have put the letter aside at once to hand it to the servant in the morning had she not noticed two markings on the envelope that strangely interested her. One was the date, just a month after she was born. The other was the inscription on the flap in back, which read as follows:

from Miss Moira McCoy,
Lutheran Maternity Hospital,
2243 Bismarck Street.

Her own name, on a letter almost as old as she was! She laid it down. She ought not to read it, of course. But it certainly was hard to resist knowing what some little Irish girl in the hospital (who made her capital "m's" with three vertical lines and a horizontal bar across the top) was thinking and doing a month after she was born. Wasn't there a "statute of limitations" on letters? No letter nearly twenty years old could be private. The lure of romance that lurked in the envelope was too strong. She hastily drew out the folded sheet and read:

My Dear Mrs. Williams:

Just a note to tell you how honoured and tickled I am that you are going to name your little daughter after me.

I hope to see her some time soon, and you also. I am so busy now, but in two or three weeks I could call on my day off, Thursday, if it could be arranged.

So you love your new place? I'm so glad. We all miss you and—my pretty little namesake. How proud it makes me.

Sincerely your friend,

Moira McCoy.

She had never heard of Ellen's having a baby, and if she had just been naming it when this letter

was written it should have been about the same age as herself. How curious it was that she and Ellen's baby should have had the same name. Perhaps her mother had liked the name and borrowed it from Ellen, for Mathilda would take what she wanted; but it did seem unlikely she would take the name of the cook's baby for her own. And what had become of Ellen's Moira? She would ask Ellen about it in the morning. Never had her curiosity been so oddly and intensely aroused.

She cast the letter from her and opened Hugo, but her eyes were heavy and her mind weary with the thoughts and excitements of that day. In a few moments she was asleep.

When she awoke in the morning the first thing she thought of was the letter, and she reread it. The mystery had clearly taken a strong hold upon her mind. While dressing she decided to postpone seeing Ellen, and every time she went to her room during the day she read the letter again and asked herself more and more puzzling questions about it. Why, for example, had Ellen never spoken of her child, particularly if it had the same name as herself? Was there something distasteful in the recollection either to Ellen or to her mistress?

Moira could not get into the Hugo book at all. Instead she took a long drive in her car and, finding that a bore, she tried riding which proved no

better. She was tempted to hunt up Rob or telephone for Selden and go somewhere for a cocktail and a dance. Failing to reach either of them or to decide on anything definite to do, she began to find Ellen a source of enormous interest. Hardly realizing it, she spied upon her all afternoon, and searched her smiling, unconcerned features whenever she appeared. It was hard to think of Ellen ever having had a baby. She stopped herself from pursuing this obsession a half a dozen times, but the spell of curiosity lingered. And still she could not bring herself to speak to the woman. By nightfall she was scattered and depressed, with the feeling of having spent a wasted day.

She went to bed early and tried again to read Hugo, but instead, she found herself rereading the McCoy letter. It drew her like a sinister charm. She threw on a dressing gown and began walking in the room. For the first time in her whole life her fingers shook as she started to take a cigarette from her box, and actually muffed it. This made her angry, and she lit the cigarette swiftly and fiercely and clattered the box down on the table. Then she was able to laugh and upbraid herself.

"Good Lord!" she cried. "What has the cook and her offspring to do with me? Why am I so excited?"

But even as the words died on her lips her re-

assurance departed. She would never get control of herself until she investigated. Why hadn't she talked to Ellen that day and got this foolish curiosity off her mind? The woman would think it strange if she called on her at this late hour to return a twenty-year-old letter, even though it contained sacred memories. Yet why should Ellen think that? She would simply slip down and hand her the letter with some gay nonsense about it being better twenty years late than never, and if Ellen wasn't tired and seemed talkative she would ask her about the coincidence of names. It was certainly no new thing in that house for Moira to do whimsical and unexpected things. She could come back and sleep and dream of her blessed Hal—poor Hal, he had hardly had a thought from her all day.

The regular servants' rooms were at the top of the house, but Ellen lived alone in the little wing off the kitchen. She had chosen this ground floor room because it was closer to the affairs that directly concerned her, outside and in, and because she was a privileged person, the dean of the servants. Moira's visit then would disturb nobody. She drew her pretty gown about her and walked boldly downstairs, knocked, made a laughing request to be admitted and waited for the startled woman to put something around her and unlock the door.

"Is this your letter, Ellen?" she asked. "I

found it last night and meant to give it to you today, but forgot it. I thought you'd be so glad to get it back, I'd just come down and give it to you before I went to sleep. You see . . . I read it—the date was so near my birthday.''

Ellen opened the letter and read it through with apparent awkwardness and difficulty.

''Why, Miss Moira, where did you get this? It's been lost for years. I didn't know it was in existence.''

''I found it in a book upstairs.''

''My land! How did it get there, I wonder?''

''It was an old volume of Hugo's—'Les Misérables.' ''

The girl winced a little as Ellen repeated the name after her and mispronounced it schoolboy fashion.

''Oh, yes, yes, I remember. That's so many years ago. To think this letter has been there all that time!''

''I didn't know you had ever had a baby, Ellen. Tell me about it. Are you too sleepy?''

''No, I'm not sleepy, Miss Moira—'' Ellen's politeness prompted the words, yet the girl caught a hint that she would have liked to end the conversation. ''You—you startled me so,'' she went on. ''But—there isn't anything to tell.''

''Did she die?''

''Yes, Miss Moira.''

The fidgety excitement which seized the grey-haired woman was understandable on the ground of old memories being suddenly aroused. Moira's voice expressed the tenderest sympathy.

"How sad. She would have been such a comfort to you now."

"Yes. But that's all so long ago, ma'am. It's the way things happen in this world for some of us."

"And your husband? Is he dead, too?"

The questioning was becoming more and more difficult for Ellen. When she answered it was with a touch of impatience.

"I don't know. I don't know where he is."

"He deserted you?"

"Yes."

Moira felt the need of some apology, induced by Ellen's uneasiness, but the very fact that the information was unsatisfactory made her perversely eager to stay, although the little room oppressed her.

"I suppose you think I'm awfully curious, Ellen," she said, with a short laugh. "And very inconsiderate to come and talk to you about these things at this time of night. But it seems so strange that you've been here ever since I can remember, and I've never heard about them—I suppose I thought you didn't have an early life. You're so cheerful, one doesn't imagine you've had sorrows."

"People forget, ma'am. You can't stay sad always."

"Isn't it funny," Moira broke in, "that I've got the same name your daughter had?"

"Ye-es—I guess it is."

Ellen's forced laugh and strained expression, and the tongue-tied moment that followed, were as hard for Moira as for the speaker. The silence lengthened. The older woman twisted in her uncomfortable seat on the bed. She obviously did not want to be looked at nor to look at the girl. Why, thought Moira, should she make all this fuss over old memories? What harm was in them? Ellen was not naturally shy —she could be voluble enough at times, and quite intelligent.

"And we were just about the same age, weren't we?"

"No, oh, no," burst out the other, and stopped suddenly.

"But the letter is dated so near my birthday," said Moira, a little brusquely, "and speaks of your baby's christening. We'd have to be."

"Bu-but—my little girl was christened very late."

"She was christened about the time I was, by the same name, and in the same house? Why, it's really a romantic idea, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Ellen, "that was how it was. Your —your mother liked the name too."

Moira felt a wave of compassion for the lonely old woman. There seemed to be nothing left to do but to go. She rose as if to do so, and then that impulse of sympathy caused her to sit down beside the other on the bed. She spoke very gently.

"Ellen, I'm sorry, I've been opening an old wound, haven't I? I can see that it hurts you. You understand why I am so interested—because of the name? That's natural, isn't it? But I'm glad to have learned about it. I shall think of you so differently from now on."

"Yes, Miss Moira, thank you." The girl's closeness to her and sympathy made Ellen's voice tremble. She looked down at the letter which she had been rolling and twisting in her fingers, and following her glance, Moira realized that her own curiosity was not appeased at all. The mystery was as much a mystery as ever.

"Why, you're destroying your letter," she said with a laugh, and took it from her and straightened it out. "You must have been fond of Miss McCoy," she added gently. "Was she your friend?"

"Yes."

"Was she sick, in the hospital?"

"No, she—she was a nurse."

"Oh, of course. She speaks of being so busy and of missing you. And you had your baby there?"

"Yes."

"That old hospital is still there, Ellen. I've driven by it a dozen times going to town. It doesn't look like a very cheerful place to have a baby, but I guess it was nicer in those days."

"It was all right," said Ellen. Moira impulsively reached an arm about her waist.

"Well, I'm going now. You don't want to talk any more about it, do you, dear? I'll ask mother to tell me the story. Can I—can I keep this letter, just to show her? I'll tell her the odd way I came across it."

Ellen's hand flew in terror to the crumpled letter.

"No—no, please, Miss Moira. Give it to me," she begged.

The violence of her action, its commanding tone, brought a flush of anger to Moira's face. She relinquished the letter.

"Oh," she said, in a changed voice. "I suppose I should apologize—that is, no doubt you are angry that I read it."

"Yes, you shouldn't have done that."

The servant spoke for the first time naturally, sincerely and vigorously, and by contrast it made all her previous answers seem to Moira like a patch-work of unreality and embarrassed evasion. Moreover, the accusing tone of the remark added fuel to her resentment. She arose and drew her dressing gown about her with a gesture

of dignity. This time she certainly must go. And yet she was hurt and offended. Her only intent had been one of genuine interest and sympathy, and it had been badly received. As she stood in the floor in this puzzled, dissatisfied state, she caught sight of Ellen's face appealing to her pathetically.

"Please, Miss Moira," the woman whispered hoarsely, "don't tell Mrs. Seymour, don't tell her about this letter, or that you were here, or anything."

The girl answered with an abrupt gesture of impatience.

"Ellen, I don't understand. What is all this secrecy, this mystery for? I found your letter, I came to give it back to you and asked a simple question—and you treat me as though I had done something criminal. It's foolish. I don't see why I shouldn't ask mother."

A blank panic seemed to have seized Ellen. She snatched the girl's hand and went on in the same hoarse voice:

"I can't explain, but only don't, don't say anything to her. For her sake, for everybody's sake, please!"

Moira experienced a momentary insane illumination. It made her heart stop and then flutter and then stop again. Twice in her life she had felt herself near death—once in an accident with her car, and once when her horse had thrown her.

She felt now the same sensation she had felt then. The questions that came to her lips would have seemed to her idiotic a moment before. Yet they came irresistibly.

"Ellen," she cried, "what does all this mean? Have I got anything to do with it?"

"You? Oh, no, no," cried Ellen. "No, you mustn't think that!"

"Was that baby me?"

"Oh, Miss Moira, how can you—how can you dream—?"

"Are you my mother, Ellen? Tell me the truth. I'll never leave here until I hear the truth. I'll search this room, every inch of it."

But she did not need her answer in words. Ellen's strength was gone. Her mouth gibbered and her face ran tears. The girl sat down heavily, as though she were facing a job that had to be got over with. She never doubted the truth after that first glimpse of it, never tried to find a loophole. There were simply details to be heard, the future to be considered. She must get the whole story from Ellen, talk it over, make some decision. It would be half the night before she was through with it, and she hated it. . . .

The sun had, in fact, appeared when she emerged from the little room, with a strange tale in her possession, pieced together from the incoherent reminiscences of Ellen. She had forgiven Mrs. Seymour, forgiven her real mother, forgiven

all of them for the deception. It was only herself that she could not forgive, herself, humiliated by the degrading masquerade of twenty years.

The knowledge that gave her most courage was her illegitimacy—which was clear from Ellen's reticence. Better that a thousand times, better a complete outcast, than a respectable nobody. She would go, of course, go in secret, that day. She could take the fewest possible things, put them in her car when no one was looking, and drive to town. What money she needed to get established elsewhere she would have to take from her own account at the bank, as a loan. Ellen had been sworn to say nothing of the discovery.

She stood at her window watching the first sun gild the tops of the knolls, drive the low-lying mists slowly before it. This great knee of a hill, this Penthesilea's knee, had been a mother's knee to her, more truly than any human one. There were no relationships in Nature, and this, the memory of her youth, could not be taken from her. . . . But it would be long before she would see the morning rise from that window again, and she lingered over it; not sentimentally. Why couldn't she feel sad? Why was she so hard—why had she been so cruel to Ellen? She could hear her now pleading that she had given up Moira for her good, pleading the advantages that had come to them by the sacrifice. Empty advantages, thought their possessor, immorally got and

useless to her now, just so many more things to bid good-bye to. The only thing that counted was Hal; if she was bitter it was because she feared yielding to that. Fate had thrown her to Hal and snatched her away in the moment of realization. . . .

She turned from the full day flooding the window and went to her desk. She wanted to write to him now, while she was strongest.

> Dear [she wrote]: I know what you would say. You would say that it made no difference, and it would not now. But some day it would, it would grow upon us and smother us. It would be 'my past,' and the time would come when your pride might make you hate me, for I would hate myself. I can face this now. I don't know whether I could face it later. I must go away and do something to absolve myself in my own eyes. And you must not interfere—you cannot. It will be years before I can see you again. I shall never forget these short days, too precious to describe. It is almost enough, that memory, without anything more. Good-bye.

She could write no more, explain no more, though she wanted to. She suddenly reflected on the injustice of having to carry all the responsibility herself. She would have to repulse every

advance, however much she might long to accept it.

She laid down her pen—a gold one that matched the other little tools on her writing table—with a gesture that signified she was laying down everything else in the room, the thousand things she had used and loved, the horses, the trees, the long, dear roads, the very air of Thornhill.

XV

The only things she saw at first were as dreary and tragic as herself. It began the moment she left Thornhill, with her last vision of Ellen's agonizing, tear-stained face hiding at her window on the circular drive. Then came the ride alone, through hot rows of dusty, dull brick houses; the terror-inspiring sight of lives straitened and stagnant through poverty; the abysmal reek of the neighbourhood, near a glue factory, where she left her car in the garage, with instructions to return it on the morrow, and engaged an express man to take her trunk; the long file of weary, hopeful people with little green bills in their hands at the bank—worshippers in the modern temple; the immigrants at Union Station, sprawling on the circular benches about the pillars, hemmed in by their squalid baggage and children; the herding of exhausted, stupid families from the country trains to the street-cars and from the street-cars to the trains; the smoke-patined inferno of the city sweating in the heat after the clean beauty of her home. . . .

She had been unable to get away in time to buy a berth in the fast train. In order to leave that day, which was imperative, she was forced to take

the "two-day" train, and tried to console herself with the thought that its second-rateness would more effectually cover her flight. But the endless trip in coaches that contained unprepossessing persons from the lower social chaos added to the weight that lay on her spirit.

The first night on the train she slept early and long, fatigued by a day full of tasks, but the second she lay staring at the polished red back of the berth above, her shade drawn up, her smarting eyes conscious of the jabbing flashes of light as they passed through sleeping towns, or straining out over dark, shuddering mysteries of country; planning, wondering, trying to anticipate what life would be like one year, two years, five years from to-night. Where should she be; whom should she know? Should she be alive? Yes, she promised herself, she would be that. The one thing she could not admit was that life might end before she had fought it out.

Once she asked herself what Mathilda was doing, for by this time her flight was an old story, the worst of the scene between Ellen and Mathilda was over. But they would be dreadfully unhappy nevertheless, and the pity she could spare to them softened her own sense of wrong. She flashed on the electric light in the berth and looked at her watch. In six hours, had it not been for Victor Hugo, for a little scrawled note written a fifth of a century ago, she would have been meeting Hal

Blaydon at the Blythedale platform. And who could say—if she had married Hal and learned the truth afterward—would it have made any difference after all?

It was morning when they got beyond Pittsburgh and, sleepless and discouraged, the grey day greeted her dismally. All she was able to see beyond the window were little grimy houses belonging to coal miners—they painted them a deep red or black in those parts, she supposed because all life was accursed. For long distances nothing caught her eye but these colours of Hell borrowed for earthly use. On a high slope, dingy with slag and coal screenings and dust, there was a black, sorry-looking house, where two children were swinging across the cheap frame porch far above the train. They were singing, and it struck her as the oddest thing she had ever witnessed. There were many houses like it on that coal bank. Where there wasn't coal there was yellow mud. Where there were not either there were piles of rusty iron. She might come to this herself, to ugliness and hunger. She shuddered and darkened the berth, hiding her face from the vision as though it would sear her beauty and put an end to her youth. Hardly a moment later, it seemed, the porter awakened her from a deep sleep. They were in the Pennsylvania station.

Moira's mood changed the moment she stood in the rotunda. The powerful magic of the city

stirred her. Had it been raining as only it can rain in New York, had the streets been ice-bound or blistering in mid-summer heat, she would have felt that great surge unabated.

But to-day the city was in one of its magnificent sunny moods, laughing at its own comic and gracile charms, whimsical with unreliable winds, one of those startling, extravagant days when a walk in any street has the effect of champagne. On a sudden impulse she ordered the cab to the Ritz. She would enjoy one day, one supreme spell of indifference and the sense of power, one hour at court when the regal town must treat her with its finest smiles and courtesies. She wrote boldly on the register "Mary Smith," and the simple dignity of the name made it distinguished in that long list of high-sounding titles.

She breakfasted in state in her bedroom, looking over Park Avenue toward the great railroad terminus, the innumerable roofs, which stretched like irregular stepping stones to the river, the gracious bridge uptown. She drove in a barouche to the Metropolitan Museum and then down the Avenue, scenting its fine airs, and lingering on its elegant details in the slow-moving vehicle; the gay pile of the Plaza, like a monument erected to an Empress' holiday; the pearly home of the Vander-somethings, with its birdlike little statue of the architect in a Rembrandt cap, perched among the décor of its roof; the quaintly painted

florist's building in the forties; broad, gleaming windows wherein the comfort of grizzled millionaires was framed for the public's delectation; the sleek cathedrals, English and Roman, agreeably sunning themselves—almost tête-à-tête, with an air of after-dinner ease; the occasional brown, old-fashioned banks, which one took at first glance to be dwellings; the Library, squat with sedentary scholarship and stained by too much knowledge of good and evil; the mosque-like corner of the Waldorf; and far down where the Avenue narrowed, pleasant-memoried houses of the older time, and a freshly be-painted little French hotel, bright and impudent as a hat box from the Rue de La Paix.

This last looked so suitable to her state of high spirits that she called to the driver to stop there. Strangely enough she had never been in the Brevoort. She slipped down into the basement café and was soon looking at the multiplied images of people in the mirrors that panelled the walls; among them stocky, dapper bachelors, arty, bearded men, a tall tan young fellow in a Norfolk, seemingly much fascinated with his companion, a much older woman with a weathered elegant face. She liked these. This, she supposed, had something to do with Greenwich Village, though except through picture and story, she knew nothing of it. But as she poured her tea for herself, she felt suddenly it was not the place to be alone. How

easy it would be to go upstairs now, to send a telegram to Hal. The unholy notion made her finish her luncheon and leave.

She went back by bus and walked about through half a dozen shops, then to a round of galleries, and finally, tired out, to the hotel. The thrill was over as she watched the day die on the housetops of the East Side, and she almost wished she did not have to spend the night there. She wanted to be at work, after all, the sooner the better; nothing else could save her from boredom and despair. To-morrow she would launch herself on the unknown stream.

She bought a ticket to a Russian variety show, which was just then having a vogue on Broadway, and found forgetfulness between its exotic charm and the night-view from the theatre roof, of the yellow-dappled park, its motors skimming and swerving upon curved ribbons of road. As she turned for a last look at it, standing apart from the crowd filing out, her solitary figure attracted the glances of a score of prosperous-looking men. But she did not see them. She thought:

"This is so vast, what can it matter who one is? The Moira of yesterday is just as small compared to it, as this one here. Why should I care?"

She laughed at this bit of philosophy. It was not particularly comforting, but it helped her to believe that she had given up the past. . . . In

her dreams the visions of the day mingled kaleidoscopically.

Moira knew nothing about New York in a practical way. Her path had always been the narrow round tripped by the fashionable visitor. Therefore, as she sat at breakfast with the "classified" columns of the *Times* before her she had no idea where she wanted to live. It happened that the first addresses that she jotted down in her notebook were far downtown and to these she went looking for the cheapest single room she could find.

The sights that met her eye filled her with half-humorous, half-tragic emotions. The landladies who greeted her were in the main revolting; she was taken into rooms that smelled, rooms that had cheap iron beds with battered brass knobs, that had carpets with holes in them and frayed lace curtains, grey with dirt, and hideous oak furnishings and coloured calendars on the walls. Three-fourths of them were not cleaned oftener than once a month, she was certain, and she determined to have cleanliness though every other comfort failed.

She found it at last. On the west side of the Village she was attracted by a neat card bearing the words "furnished rooms" on the door of a brick house that looked many degrees better kept than its neighbours. A shy grey-haired woman admitted her. There were several rooms, all spot-

less, and she selected one reasonably priced, with white painted woodwork and plain furniture that she thought she might manage to live with. When she asked for the telephone to send for her luggage from the hotel, she was shown into the daughter's room. In one corner of this pure haven was a small, square stand covered with chintz and draped with flowered cretonne. Upon it stood a discarded perfume bottle filled with holy water, a prayer-book and catechism, and a tall white statuette of the Virgin and child, with the monogram M. A. on the rococo base. On the wall above the stand was a black crucifix with the Christ in gilt. Behind the Christ was thrust a little palm cross. Still higher than the crucifix hung a photo-engraving of the Madonna and child from some Italian master, in a gilded frame. The homely simplicity of the scene brought tears to the girl's eyes. . . .

But she felt a little less benevolent the next day when she asked Mrs. McCabe why there were no mirrors in the bathroom. That lady gazed at her with the sad severity of the timid and replied:

"I don't know. There just ain't, and there won't be."

In this atmosphere of staggering piety began the career of "Mary Smith."

XVI

By the end of two years Moira had repaid the last of the five hundred with which she had possessed herself on leaving Thornhill; and accumulated a surplus of her own. From the day she quitted the Munson School of Stenography and Typewriting she had never experienced difficulty in securing a job and in making an excellent impression. The two changes which she had made were of her own volition. For more than six months now she had been secretary to the executive vice-president of a soap company and had become something of an executive herself, on a salary that still had a good margin in which to grow.

This man was typical of the average young organizing and selling marvel of the day, but he had a quality of intelligence in matters outside of business—limited, yet enough to be refreshing after the others she had encountered. Moira did not feel, as she had in other places, that she must suppress all the evidences of her breeding and education. This she had actually attempted to do hitherto; diplomatically ignoring awkward and ungrammatical English, adopting as much slang as she could retain without practice on the outside, and generally pretending to be quite as much

the low brow as most of the other girls whose chatter bewildered her in the washroom.

With Barcroft, for the first time, she could permit herself to be natural, and this sense of ease increased her value enormously in "meeting the trade" and handling difficult people in his absence. She checked him up on his errors of dictation without shame, but she had the rare good sense to know just when he was wiser in being wrong. She grew to respect, rather than disdain, the qualities that made men successful in business. They were qualities that did not interest her essentially, yet Barcroft's mind had mysterious powers of insight that often called for silent applause.

Their relations developed into friendliness, and she felt his honest admiration without the fear that it would lead to complications. She had never yet herself encountered the boss-turned-lover—and the case was reputed to be so common that she felt far from flattered. She tried to account for it on the score of her natural dignity, her quiet mode of dressing, her application to work, and her reticence; but these did not explain. She was not conspicuously dignified—when it seemed to her good to laugh she did so. Nor did she dress unattractively, much as she respected her budget. And her efficiency was not nearly so obtrusive as some brands of it she had observed. Moreover these qualities, she believed, in a young

and good-looking woman, would only make her more pleasing to men. She mocked at the whole business; it was another of those favourite American panics, like the white slave traffic, the German spy-hunt, and the innumerable other horrors that supported the newspapers and bred the violence of mobs.

She congratulated herself, nevertheless, that in spite of Barcroft's understanding and deference, nothing of that sort was remotely likely to happen. She had found a good post, agreeably within her powers and therefore easy, and she would be able to keep it indefinitely, with the hope of a steadily mounting salary. Then one evening they fell into a conversation after office hours. It ranged everywhere from the staging of Arthur Hopkins to the value of rotogravure as an advertising medium, from the proper length of skirts to the latest novel, and Barcroft broke into the discussion suddenly by making love to her. He too was a victim, as it appeared, of the quarrelsome and haphazard home.

She had often asked herself, with some bitterness, what advantage her early life gave her in such a career as she now had to follow. She found it in this instance the most useful equipment she could have. Another girl would have thrown up the job. She managed adroitly to save it. She was not at all shocked by Barcroft's love-making. She felt sorry for him; she talked to him sympa-

thetically about his troubles, and in the end they were better friends than ever. Moreover, he was not long afterward grateful to her . . . the wife had come out victor over her lord . . . the yoke was again pleasing to his neck.

Her life outside of the office was so devoid of romance that this brush with it at the soap company was not unpleasant. She had occupied more than one furnished room since the start at Mrs. McCabe's, and in her wanderings she had come necessarily in contact with the Village life, but she did not adopt its easy associations. She discovered very early that the Village was the gossip shop of the country. National—and international—news travelled fast there from tongue to tongue, concerning people even slightly known or connected with the known. You could not say when you would walk into one of its restaurants and find at the next table a prominent matron of your city. A half a dozen times she had dodged or stared down old acquaintances on the upper Avenue.

There were girls she met from day to day, willing to become her friends—attractive girls who were doing interesting things. A few good cronies of this sort would have lightened her solitary evenings and perhaps helped her to find work more congenial than business. But friendships, to be worth while, had to be frank. She knew she would be tempted defiantly to tell all

about herself, and she shrank from doing so. Native resourcefulness made it easy to draw the line of separation, but pride made it hard. She realized that her aloofness was causing criticism. In the two restaurants where she took most of her evening meals—because they were cheap and clean—the talk was not sympathetic. If one was free to have lovers *ad lib.* in the Village one was obviously not free to dispense with friends entirely. She seemed a snob.

There were times when she gave herself up to storms of grief. It grew to be an act of self-preservation, a part of her philosophy of endurance. Long spells of weeping, or of a weary, helpless state of the spirit that was more thoroughly a surrender and resignation than tears. Again and again she would cry through the darkness for Hal with the plaintive voice of a sick child—and even for the kind ghost of Mathilda Seymour. If she felt ashamed of these indulgences, she argued that there could be no harm in them. Her old friends could not hear her. She was alone in all those little rooms, completely cut off from anything familiar, from all but the fluttering, unreal, poignant memories of her beautiful childhood. Waves of passionate self-pity swept over her; she rebelled aloud against the bitter meanness of her betrayal; the awful burden of carrying her secret alone.

In the end it was wise that she did not deny

these moods when they came to her and did not try to control them. From them she rose calm and clear-headed, charged with newly stored courage. They were spiritual baths, which cleaned her, a sort of self-asserting prayer. When they had gone not a vestige of rebellion was left in her; she felt grown in stature, ready to carry her fate like a flag. For a day or two afterward she would be sentimental and overfull of feeling. She would go out of her way to help beggars and walk a block to give dimes to the hurdy-gurdy man; and comfort the little girls in the filing room if they weren't feeling well, or had just been called down by the head clerk.

One thing that these rituals of solitary suffering gave her was the buoyant, happy consciousness of artistic power, and she longed to return to painting. Until now it had seemed impossible. She could not command the space, the office robbed her of daylight, materials were too costly. Now she began to dream of creating a studio—the opportunity to work might be managed somehow, once she had acquired the facilities. She saved more sedulously, giving up a part of her pleasures, an occasional new book and a theatre now and then, furbishing clothes for herself despite her hatred of the needle.

XVII

The floors were done and dry. Elsie Jennings, who had come in to help, was putting the third coat of black upon the new book-shelves, and Moira was waiting for the delivery of her three last pieces of furniture, which completed the picture, for a time at least. Whether they came as they had been promised or not, the house-warming party was to be held that evening, with Elsie, Jade Sommers, and Arthur, her husband.

Arthur Sommers she had met as a printing salesman, visiting her office, and later had run across with Jade in a restaurant. He was a good sort, in his early thirties, jovial and proud of his plain citizenship, inclined to stoutness and much in love with his wife, the story writer. Elsie ran a shop in which she sold hand-made novelties and small house furnishings, that caught the sight-seers from the States and uptown with their faintly futurist air. It was a Saturday in the Spring, and had the party been postponed two days it might have celebrated Moira's birthday. But she did not divulge that fact.

"There," said Elsie, "it's done. And I think three coats will be enough."

"Not so bad," replied Moira. She stood making an inspection of her nearly finished home. The apartment itself was a discovery—quite a bargain—one huge room with tall windows, and a tiny bedroom and bath and kitchen closet, in an old five-story house, occupied by a small army of nondescript tenants.

"How good you look to me, old barn!" was her fervent thought, which Elsie, watching her, divined. "If those chairs don't come pretty soon," she went on aloud, "they won't come at all, and somebody will have to sit on the floor. I'm going out to shop for food."

"Yes, go ahead," said Elsie. "This box of china has got to be unpacked and washed. I'll do that in the meantime."

Moira had been in and out of the building on many occasions during the past week, but her curiosity had been slight regarding her neighbours. She couldn't afford to be particular about them, so it seemed to her pointless to be curious. As she went downstairs, however, on the way to the grocery, a name on the door to a small room caught her attention.

"Miles Harlindew!" she said, and found her memory flying to years before at Thornhill, and her lips repeating some lines about:

"All shining parallels of track,
All brown roads leading up."

She had begun to see the man's verses in the literary magazines when she couldn't have been more than sixteen or seventeen, and many of them had sung themselves into her memory. One or two had given her an experience of discovery. But for the last few years she had found no more of his work. She had imagined him for some reason, as people are likely to think of anybody at all who gets things published, as successful, comfortable, arrived.

"He must be getting along in years," she thought. "Poor fellow!" For she knew that room corresponded to her bedroom above, a mere cubby-hole, so small that she had to sit on her bed to look in the dressing table mirror.

It was her first party in years, and she did not need the cocktails—which Arthur Sommers had brought in a silver flask—to give her a thrill. She fell in love with her guests and charmed them into something like wonder. So this was the unapproachable Mary Smith!

"Oh, I've got distinguished literary neighbours," she announced. "Miles Harlindew is on the floor below."

A ripple of amusement greeted her remark.

"But I remember some stunning poems of his," she went on.

"Oh, yes," put in Jade, "but nobody knows he's alive these days. He doesn't even know it himself."

"Come off," said her husband. "I see him often, very much alive. Any man who does his duty violating the Eighteenth Amendment as regularly as Miles, has my vote. What do you say if I get him."

"If he's sober," put in Jade.

Sommers glanced at Moira for consent, and she gave it with a brisk nod. These people knew more about the man than she and no doubt were justified in what they said; nevertheless she felt a vague resentment. What would they say if they knew all there was to be known about herself? Experience had already taught her that beneath the literal and semi-bohemian veneer of her friends there was a stern core of respectability.

Harlindew came and was sober. He was painfully and tiresomely sober, and she heartily wished they had saved some of Arthur's cocktails. He sat down stiffly and ventured commonplaces when spoken to. She found him a satisfactory physical specimen, showing more years than she expected, in premature lines. He was neither tall nor short, of the type that never acquires flesh, somewhat shaggy behind the ears, with a lop-sided face. One jaw was stronger than the other, one eye keener than the other, one brow more pleasing in conformation than the other—and these inequalities were not all on the same side of his face.

When she recited his verses, he was not pleased. He depreciated them vigorously and was very uncomfortable. He called them the errors of his youth. The one thing that he took extraordinary interest in was a talk with Sommers about business. She then watched his gestures and animation with pleasure. They made a change in the man's whole appearance.

"I'm thinking seriously of going into business," he announced in a grave voice, and seemed a little disappointed that this statement was not received with greater acclaim. The evening ended, dampened, on the whole, by his presence.

"How fiercely shy he is about his work," said Moira to the others, as they stood at the door ready to go.

"Big night last night," said Arthur, in a stage whisper. "Feeling rocky."

"I hope you don't meet him somewhere at three in the morning," added Elsie. "He'll reel it off to you then until you'll be sorry."

Yet she thought more about what she saw of Harlindew, during his short stay in her rooms, than of anything else that had happened that night. He was the only young man she had met in New York whom she wanted to talk to. It was, possibly, a childish delusion, a fancy arising out of the fact that both of them were miserable about something, obviously about something it was impossible to discuss.

A few days later she met him on the stairs, and he blushed and stammered:

"I believe you are the only person alive who still cares anything for my poetry."

He was gone too quickly for her to answer. She did not see him again for a week, and when she did she invited him to tea. In an hour he was as much at his ease as though he had known her forever, and stayed so long he expressed the fear of having bored her. Soon after that she was seeing him two or three times a week.

He came because she listened to his monologues. Moira found that this was the man's characteristic. Shy to the point of morbidness in company, she no sooner began to encourage him alone than he talked without end. His ideas were neither very well thought out nor very clearly expressed, but they stimulated her. He poured forth the most curious tag-ends of experience, made extraordinary confessions with few traces of shame, chattered cynically, humorously, passionately and autocratically by turns about writing and all the arts, and then stopped suddenly in the midst of things, frightened to silence by the realization of her presence and the boldness of his own tongue. Only one thing could have enabled him to indulge this luxury and keep coming—a knowledge of her interest, and she gave it honestly. She saw that the inner life of this young man and her own had been similar. He soon passed from Miss Smith

to Mary, and from Mary to Madonna, and finding that the last was to his taste, he held to it. Before long he was giving full rein to a natural streak of fantastic high spirits and messing about her place like a privileged person.

She was, for some reason, wholly delighted by all this. The crushed spirit he had shown at their first meeting had seemed tragically inappropriate and she was glad to be drawing anybody out who needed it. The man, set beside most of the people she had known, was a freak, certainly, but he was not an impossible freak. And he differed from such people as Selden Van Nostrand in depth, breadth and sensitive contact with life. With a perfectly conventional background, he had simply, she thought, allowed his spiritual life to express itself in his physical life from an early age. His courtesy was innate and usually unfailing, on some occasions oppressive—but it was a quality she would not have liked to find lacking. His flattery she had to accept as simply as she could; he exhausted his vocabulary in finding terms for her beauty. It seemed an ever-renewed miracle to him, which he had to talk about to enjoy.

"Madonna," he said one day, "you should be some queen like Margaret of Navarre. I should like to be one of the story tellers of your court. It is a commentary on our beastly times that such a one as you is a stenographer."

"If I had the courage—as you have—I wouldn't

be," she laughed, "but it scares me to think of going my own way."

"Ah, that is one thing I came to ask you about. I must have told you that I intend going into business."

"But why?" she asked, "why should you, after all?"

"Well, when we are young we expect all things to come to us. We don't want them just to-day, but to-morrow?—we'll whistle and down they will come from the sky. That's what we think. In my case, however, they haven't come. Ergo, I have lived disgracefully. Now I must begin to die gracefully by turning to work. Yet isn't it possible to look upon the grotesque preoccupation of the American male as a trade, a form of artisanship, a deed of the left hand? I know a man who sells advertising, and who has more confidence in me than I should dare to have in myself. He is decent enough to think that I can supply what he wants. Why not try it?"

"Aren't you writing anything nowadays, Miles?"

"Nothing," he said, with a shrug. "Book reviews! What are book reviews? Every time I have to go to see an editor and ask for a book, it makes me feel as though selling hairpins from house to house is more respectable. Besides, the literary world has forgotten me. I only fill up space."

"Nonsense," said she vehemently. "And you're wrong about business. Business is pretty awful. I suppose you'll have to find that out for yourself."

"There *are* more delightful occupations, true. I have always had an ambition to be a cab-driver. It is the sole profession in which one becomes a licensed eavesdropper. Excellent for the literary man. You know people mind the cabby no more than if he were the horse. I mean a horse-cab, of course . . . only in such leisurely vehicles do people expose their souls, their most intimate secrets. But I haven't the cabby's training. From things you have said, I fancied you knew horses."

"A little. When I was a young girl I had some playmates who owned them."

"Noble beasts. I'm sure they would break the neck of any poor fool who had condescended to Pegasus."

"The trouble with you, Miles, is that you don't condescend often enough, nor persistently enough. You ought to be writing poems at this moment. You should have been doing it these last five years."

"The impulse to creation begins with a peculiar tickling of the tummy that I haven't felt for ages."

Her eagerness to start him writing usually came to nothing in some such joke. At other times he would grow more serious.

"No, Madonna, I cannot. The blossom of life

is gone—only the bare stalk is left. It may flower again, but it must be watered and fed. My affair with poetry has ended like so many marriages—in disillusion. That is rough, when one realizes that poetry demands the hardest labour for the smallest return of any occupation on earth. It takes all one's youth, at the expense of practical things—and one is left with a handful of frail results that are hardly more substantial than memories. But the greater the early love, the more complete must be the separation, and one must recognize it when it comes. One must renounce; in that lies the only hope of renewal. People are mistaken about life being a steady progress from youth to age, anyway. It's a constant shuttling from age to youth and back again. We all grow senile about every seven years, and then young again. I am in a senile period. Why should I do poetry the dishonour of pursuing her in such a state. Bah, it is better to do anything else. You mustn't be impatient with me. I do not flower very often—but neither does the century plant. And it is counted among the world's wonders."

"Well," she said consolingly, "perhaps you are right. Better a little that is good than a lot that is indifferent. All I know is that there are reputations built on no more talent than yours."

"If I could believe that," he said thoughtfully, "I should not surrender. But I can't believe it.

I shall have to squeeze business for a time, as one squeezes an orange—for the golden juice. I shall hoard it, as if every ounce meant a golden hour. Then we shall see. My God! Madonna," he burst forth. "Fifty dollars a week—there in my hand, *every week*. Think of it. All my life fifty dollars has seemed like the other side of the moon."

The next day he began the work of which he had talked so much. She had known him a month. Now for some time, she was to see little of him. He left early and returned late, and with the long summer evenings at hand, she began to paint.

It was very hard to drive herself to work. Her hands were stiff; her senses were clumsy, and her first efforts resulted in little more than a waste of valuable materials. She needed everything—models, encouragement, criticism. These even Elsie or Miles could have furnished after a fashion, but she dared not ask them—she was not ready for that. She contented herself with trials at still life, with experiments, with attempts at self-portraiture.

Then slowly the love of simply applying the brush, the fever of trying and trying again for the effects she wanted, the joy of feeling momentary hints of power, and of succeeding now and then with some little thing, quickened her interest, until the time came when she found herself standing up to her canvas until it had grown almost dark.

She went with Elsie one night to the theatre and when they returned to Elsie's rooms, Moira confessed that she had begun to work. They talked until three in the morning. She came away elated, and still sleepless, not the least bit tired. The mere divulging of her modest ambitions had started her blood bounding, and she swung buoyantly down the street.

A block or two from her house she heard voices, and against the glow of a lamp she saw the figure of a policeman leaning over a man who lay on the pavement luxuriously supporting his head from the flagging with folded arms.

"Come on, now, get up," said the officer. "I've fooled long enough. If you don't get up I'll take you where you'll have a long rest."

The voice that replied was unmistakably Miles Harlindew's. "Preposterous," he said, running his consonants together. "I am lying on m'own prop'ty. It was legally d'vised to me by God the Father. Six feet by three of solid earth. That's my allotment. You've spoiled it by putting concrete on it, but I'll be a good fellow. Won't complain. It's all right. Just go away."

"Get up, I tell ya."

"What! Can't a man lie on his own pat-patrimony, you blamed ass? It's goin' to be mine f'r eternity, and I choose to use it now!"

"We'll see who's a blamed ass, young feller. Come on!"

Moira interrupted as the patrolman was about to grasp Harlindew's shoulder.

"Officer," she said hurriedly, "I know this man. He lives in the same house I am in. I think I can get him to go with me, if you won't take him."

"Sure. That's all right. I don't want him if he'll get out of here. I've had this bird before, and it might go hard with him."

"Thank you," she said fervently. Miles was on his feet in a second, a little unsteady but effusively polite, repeating the words "divine Madonna" in a voice that must have carried to many windows.

"Officer," he said, "meet Madonna—no, meet Ariadne. Ariadne, the night is a labyrinth—you bring me a thread."

At his door he insisted upon going up with her —"just for a second"—and she could not refuse him. He sat on the couch, pursuing a strange, disjointed tale of the day's adventures. He told twice about a steel-worker he had met in a bootlegger's house, who once had worked on the Woolworth, forty stories up. "Said he never went up on the steel in the morning without three whiskies —if he had he'd a fallen off," said Miles. "That's good—if he had he'd a fallen off." The idea seemed to fill him with extraordinary delight. But other things were on his mind also. Some one he called "the damn buzzard at the office" came in for a large share of abuse.

"If you want to see the damned buzzard tomorrow, you'd better go downstairs and sleep," she suggested. "You won't feel much like work."

"Work? Never mind work. . . . Valuable man. . . . Know my own value. . . . Not at all sleepy, anyway. . . ." A moment later while she was out of the room he stretched full length on the couch and fell asleep.

She did not have the heart to wake him in the morning. If her own racket, as she flew about preparing to leave, had no effect upon his deep unconsciousness, it would probably take too much effort anyway. At noon, however, she found him just beginning to stir about, making coffee in her little kitchen, for which he apologized, but with no sheepishness. He seemed, on the contrary, to find excessive enjoyment in having awakened in a strange place, invaded by a lovely hostess. She took the rôle of cook out of his hands.

"Well," he said when they were seated, "I suppose I am in a pickle. Must say something to Jones. Wonder what it'll be. All's fair, I imagine, in war and business. Any old alibi goes."

"But you're a valuable man, Miles, you know," she mocked, "as you said several times last night."

His smile was a trifle wan. It was too soon by all means to bid good-bye to the other side of the moon—that regular fifty a week.

"You know, I've never had to be anywhere I

didn't want to be, in . . . in God knows when," he declared. "Not easy to get the habit. But I'm doing well down there. Honest, I'm sort of proud about it."

Moira thought that he seemed to be worrying very little about his remissness, not even very actively at work on the problem of finding an excuse. And it was late, even for that. She almost hated to undeceive him, it concerned him so slightly. Finally she said:

"I telephoned your Jones. I told him you were too ill to come down. Was that right?"

But obviously this service was in his eyes incalculably great. The look he gave her made her want to laugh. She had not thought it possible for a man to be so pathetically helpless, so profoundly grateful for an act of friendly foresight.

"How did it happen, Miles?"

"Oh, I think the monotony got on my nerves. Then yesterday everything went wrong; and I thought five o'clock would never come. Eight hours! By Jove, it sometimes seems like eight years."

"Yes, it does," she replied, remembering her first months of it.

"Do you get used to it?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes, it comes to be a good deal like breathing."

XVIII

They started out without objective, left the train at a little station far down the southern part of Long Island and walked miles through a flat country of stunted woods and sandy, almost deserted roads.

It was toward the end of a coppery afternoon, the hazy air aflame with the sun taking on the colour of the burnished trees. To Moria, it had been an unreal day too, for her thoughts were running upon revolutionary impulses, plans that would have seemed impossibly romantic a few months before. Was it only because of this suddenly important comradeship with Miles Harlindew that she had quite painfully realized a sense of loss? She needed much more than life was giving her, much more than her mere comfort and independence, even than her painting. Their half year together had been full of a strangely wide sympathy. But it had also been casual, without purpose and without end. The first tang and odour of Autumn cold always brought a stirring of unreasonable energy in her, a sense of dissatisfaction . . . a prophecy of change. But now it was like nothing she had ever known before, a stifling in the midst of limitless air to breathe.

"Seasons must be responsible for a great deal

in life," she said. "I wonder if anything would get itself done at all, if it were not for them, for the urging they give us to act."

"I have thought that too," replied Miles. "You could almost live, simply by letting the time of the year do what it will with you. I shouldn't be shocked if some one told me I had lived that way myself, most of my life."

He drew out a pipe, filled and lighted it, and the fragrant smell was pleasing to her nostrils. She liked his agreeable, easy ways. He needed little to be happy, his thoughts, his books, tobacco, clothes that seemed to have grown older with him. Since that diffused night he had spent in her rooms in June, his life had run along in a quiet groove, free from excitement or discontent —a period during which, as he told her, weeks seemed so much longer because they were filled with so many more and varied impressions, and these impressions were caught and relished and fixed as they passed. Excitement and sprees were monotonous, not varied, and one lost almost all of one's impressions. . . . She had shared this slow magic with him, and she understood what he meant. Suddenly she found herself asking him to marry her.

"But, child," he said, with amusement in his face and voice, "you couldn't do that."

"I'm not a child," she replied, with unmistakable seriousness, "and I could. I love you."

He stopped walking and faced her, holding his pipe halfway to his mouth and looking at her in blank amazement.

"My dear Mary!" he exclaimed.

"My name isn't Mary," she broke in. "It's Moira. Do you like it?"

"Moira? Why haven't you told me that?"

"There's even more to tell, Miles."

"But what do you mean?"

"I suppose you won't answer my question, until you hear the rest?"

"I shall be glad to hear anything you want to tell," he replied slowly. "But first, my dear girl, do you know you are the stars in the sky? Do you know you are a prize for sultans, for emperors, for decent people, for people infinitely better than I am? I'm a stopping place in your passage. Not that. . . . I'm as worthless as a man can very well be. I think, in short, something has made you a little mad."

"You're *not* worthless," she replied vehemently. "I'm tired of hearing you say you are. . . . If all this means you don't love me and don't want me, there's nothing more to be said. If it means that you think you are not good enough for me, that's foolish. And in that case—there *is* —more to be said."

She trembled a little. Both were under the stress of a new and powerful feeling. . . . She wanted more than anything else in the world to

take hold of him, to shake him, to keep on shaking him, because he had not been equal to asking of her what she had just now asked of him. She wanted to love him as nobody had ever loved him; to love him until he respected himself. It needed no more than a spur, something to make him so proud that he could scarcely believe in his happiness. She could do that for him, she was equal to it, because she did love him and she was beautiful and desirable. She thought of herself, in that instant, as Moira Seymour of Thornhill. But in the next she did not. It was so terribly hard to say what she had to tell him.

Moira's persistence in her reckless proposal had given rise to a tempest of forces in Miles Harlindew. The notion of marrying her had never even formed in his dispirited brain. Now it swept through him like a cleansing and strengthening hope. He faced her with the uncertainty of a man who is still afraid to trust his own understanding.

"Wait, Miles!" she said, "I've something more to tell you." She began hurriedly, like a guilty child, but as she went on her voice became firm. "I don't know who my father was. I was told his name was Williams, but I don't know whether he is alive or dead. I'm the child of a servant who was never married. You see if you married me, it might be said that I wanted the protection of your name. I've none of my own."

It was his turn to be impatient, and he had an

impulse now to laugh and take her in his arms. But he held back.

"Mary," he said seriously, "in the first place what has all that to do with it?"

"But it's true. And you've forgotten my name is Moira."

"I don't care. It's all beside the point. I've never been strong for relatives, my own kin into the bargain. I might not enjoy yours. But do you suppose it makes any difference to any one who your father is? Your father and mother are your face, your beautiful, glorious face. Your birthright is yourself, your incredible perfection. Don't you see, it isn't your father or your mother you're giving up, but yourself, all this miracle? You can't give all that to me. I'm not worth it. I can't count on myself. How can I ask you to count on me?"

"You don't know yourself. You never have."

"Mary!" he cried, and she let him continue using the old name which came so naturally. She felt his intense desire to be honest, while it angered and annoyed her. Why should he decide these things for her? But he went on, "Don't you see? This is just a—a sentiment, a ridiculous illusion about your birth."

"It's *true,*" she replied. "I must know that you believe it's true—or nothing can go on."

"If it were a thousand times true it wouldn't make me good enough for you."

She sat down beside the road. Tears were coming to her eyes, and she hated to have him see them.

"Miles," she said, "I thought once I couldn't love again, but you've seemed like something lost to me and come back. It's the same thing in my heart, only older and more real. If you don't mind my being what I am, if you want me, please come and take me. Only don't argue."

His close embrace was like the end of a journey she had been travelling all these last weeks quite unconsciously. His passion, the fierce, sudden, exacting eagerness of the luckless taken unaware by great good fortune, could not hurt her too much.

"You must forgive me if I am quite mad," he stammered. "Look at me. Am I sane, Madonna beloved?"

She did look at him, but she saw, beyond the cadaverous face and humble eyes, a man who carried, she hoped, the power of change within him. She was completely happy to have that job for her own. Yesterday she had had loneliness, a heavy secret, futility. Now she had everything that she had ever lost; and more, the knowledge of her own strength. What if it did fail, it would be this while it lasted. . . .

XIX

"Oh, when I was in love with you
Then I was clean and brave,
And miles around the wonder grew
How well did I behave . . ."

"It's old Housman all over again," cried Harlindew, in high glee. "Since I married you, I've become a respected citizen. People stop me on the street and want to talk who haven't deigned to give me a wink in years."

"Don't forget there is a second verse," said Moira.

"But now the fancy passes by
And nothing will remain
And miles around they'll say that I
Am quite myself again."

"Yes, but he had to add that to make it a well-rounded thought. The first is the only one that counts. Well-rounded thoughts are an abomination. Or else he had to live up to the well known Housman cynicism. But isn't this enough for one sitting? I'm hungry."

"Just five minutes more. There's something I don't want to miss about that light. I can't ever get you into the same position twice. You're changeable enough—physically!" she concluded.

He strolled over to the portrait when she had released him and criticized it outrageously. The face was all wrong, the colour of the hair absurd, the brow too handsome. It was a good picture perhaps, but a poor portrait. Her sketches of him were better. She had a nice loose line in sketching and didn't flatter so much. Women ought never to paint men, at least never their sweethearts. They weren't honest enough. They were too romantic. But this was all delivered in the utmost good nature and she did not resent it. She thought he was quite a good critic of painting. He liked things of very crude strength, directness. Her work, she herself was inclined to admit, indulged in glamour—it was the hardest thing to avoid. But she hoped that in ten or twenty years she would do something good; that was time enough.

As a matter of fact, Miles Harlindew thought his wife's work remarkably fine and had often said so. Then, discovering she was so modest about it that praise was downright displeasing to her, he adopted the bantering tone. He catered to her modesty by giving her all the severe criticism he dared to. And on the whole it resulted in a better understanding.

Standing in the doorway, he watched her with some impatience, while she put on a hat, powdered her nose, dabbed at her nails and stood in front of the mirror gazing at herself in satisfied ani-

mation. She liked to make him wait. Then they slipped down the narrow carpeted stairs and into the brilliant afternoon, breathless and laughing. It was not surprising that people looked twice at the pair. She wondered if there were any two lovers who enjoyed their holidays together as much as they. There were so many things to do and it needed so little to make them memorable. A walk through Italian streets, flooded with little bodies and loud with cries, to some unknown restaurant; or up the Avenue in the dusk to the Park; or a long ride in front of the bus—whatever met their eyes on these jaunts was fresh and new though they had seen it a hundred times before. There was no place for a honeymoon like New York: it meant that the honeymoon never ended.

Marriage had hardly changed an outward detail of their lives. She had refused to give up her job, which he somehow expected she could do. Perhaps she could paint and try to sell her work. It appeared to him so much more fitting. But Moira did not wish to sell her paintings, even if she had thought them worth any money. All that could wait. Wasn't his work waiting too? Poor boy! How could any one expect him to write with his time all taken up?

"But," he objected, "I may have to take care of more than you one of these days. Hadn't I better get used to it?"

"Nonsense," she replied. "That's all the more reason why I should be earning now."

Miles had retained his room downstairs, much as it was, except that she saw it was kept in some sort of order for him. Her own tiny living quarters were not enough comfortably for two, and she had foreseen that he would have many a spell when he wanted to be quite alone. To her mind he was very chivalrous in hiding his low-spirited moments from her. When he left her early after dinner to spend the evening and the night in his room, she knew that it was a signal for one of these. He was working off some disappointment, some mood of defeat. These troubles had generally fled by morning. He would be in her bedroom, before she woke up, noisy and hungry, and full of jokes.

"You're making me too happy to write," he told her on one such occasion, as he sat on her bedside and put her hand to his lips. "You remember Rossetti says:

"By thine own tears thy song must tears beget
O Singer! Magic mirror thou hast none
Except thy manifest heart and save thine own
Anguish or ardour, else no amulet."

He had the old-fashioned way of reading poetry, intoning it without much shading or expression—and he threw himself into it. She thought nobody

was just like him when he did that entirely for his own pleasure.

"But he speaks of ardour as well as anguish," she objected.

"Yes, I suppose poetry itself does not have to be sad. But it comes out of something like sadness. Rossetti was right. It is as foolish to write poetry in the midst of happiness as to try to find words for what you look like now—when I can be looking at you instead. How beautiful you are when you wake."

It occurred to Moira that she might be a little distressed over all this. She wanted him to be happy, but she also wanted him to write—and become famous or at least deserve it in her eyes. But her good sense brushed his idle words aside. Why encourage harbouring such notions? She had never known any one who spoke his mind aloud so continuously as he did, and she knew that many of the things he said simply passed through it aimlessly. They were without significance except the significance of always tossing up other thoughts, and still others, until the right one came. This thinking aloud had a ruthless quality that would have hurt a more sensitive wife. It did not trouble her.

She decided there was no hurry about his getting to work. She did not want him to do it until he could do his best. Nothing less than that she wished to foster. They were living their lives to

the full, now, through each other. In good time they would branch out and live in wider circles. Miles was storing up treasures that would find utterance one of these days. Indeed he was writing—slight, experimental things which she did not like, it was true, but which would help to open up the dried springs of his invention. This period of his life was certainly not less promising than the five years before she had met him, arid years of picking up a mere living by critical trifles.

An event that she did not foresee, however, happened shortly afterward. A week came when Harlindew spent almost no time with her. He disappeared into his room early; at breakfast he seemed to have slept little, and he was distracted and irritable. When the time came to go downtown, she felt that he resented it. He would dawdle and temporize and start off anywhere from a quarter to a half hour late. The secrecy of his movements were a trial to her, and she could not get anything out of him by casual questioning. His answers were indirect, hinting at work. Then her questioning stopped. She realized that she was growing angry; malicious impulses came to her, a desire for petty revenge, and all this warned her that she was vainer than she had believed. She depended upon his attentions, his love-making, his continual amusing flattery. That was the unfairness of marriage, she argued. It taught you to expect certain things

you had got on very well without before. But if your single mate withheld them, you could not go elsewhere to supply them. . . . After six days of this, Moira began to believe herself a philosopher, and something of a cynic as well. She had kept her temper, but she had also been experimenting with the green serpent of disillusionment.

The thing ended with a visit to her bedroom at two in the morning. He was a little excited by liquor, a most unusual thing since their marriage, yet she was sure he had not been away. Most of this excitement came from another cause. He held in his hand a half a dozen sheets of paper and began without preliminaries to read them to her. They were new poems, of course—how stupid she had been not to suspect it! When he had finished reading them she snatched them from him with cries of delight and read them herself.

"I have to see the words—the blessed words!" she declared.

He walked out of the room, leaving the crinkly papers with her, walked on air yet timorously, jumping half out of his boots at every slight noise she made with the sheets. When he came back he found tear-drops clinging to her lashes. She was still reading the poems as though to fix them then and there in her mind. She laid back on the pillows and asked him to read them all over

himself aloud, and "very slowly." It was a long moment after he had ended that she spoke.

"They're better than anything you've done," she said, with a contentment that filled him with torturing pangs of delight. "As good and better than the best in your book. It's come back to you, Miles, I always knew it would. Oh, isn't it wonderful!"

He sat down, suddenly downcast and sheepish in the midst of his elation.

"But if this is going to happen to me often, what am I going to do?" he said. "I've lived those things. It's been hell and heaven, Moira. I took two afternoons off from the office. I had to. It was all but impossible to go."

She sat up in bed and gazed at him in profound reflection. She felt she knew what he meant. It was not childish, not perverse. How could such things be mixed up in the same day, this fine fervour of creation, and that mechanical, wretched work? What she most desired him to be he was now, and that he must continue to be at the cost of everything else. She suddenly saw life rosy and fresh ahead of them, untrammelled by anything base, full of brave expression.

"Never mind, never mind!" she cried excitedly. "Listen, you can hold on two months longer somehow. In two months my lease will be up. We've got eighteen hundred dollars between us now, and by that time we ought to have two thousand.

We'll just quit cold, Miles, drop everything. Somewhere in Europe we can live for nothing, live forever on that. Who knows what can happen before it is gone? We might never have to come back—never until we wanted to. You can go on writing and writing these gorgeous things!"

"My God," he murmured, "it would be marvellous. It could be done. . . . O Magician!"

XX

The experience of that night was one of those moments on the Olympus of extravagant hope, before which it is merciful to draw the veil. In one hour they seemed to have attained all that life held for the most fortunate—freedom, work, love.

Therefore, had they stepped from the tropical belt to the Arctic circle; had they plunged from the top of a sunlit tower to the depths of a coal shaft, the change which came during the next month could not have been greater. Moira had never anticipated resenting her first baby. Preparations for the trip, expenditures for the trip, had first been slackened up in mid career, as they waited apprehensively and then had been abandoned with the abruptness that only comes when death enters a house. There lay the paraphernalia of travel, new and useless. They had drifted into a state of divine negligence. Jobs and all practical affairs went along any old way; they were matters soon to be jettisoned like an old coat. Then came this reality as if the four walls of a prison had been dropped about them in a day.

It was not so bad as that of course, when the first rude awakening had passed. Life substitutes one enthusiasm for another. Miles recovered ad-

mirably at once; he spent his eloquence reassuring her that this was the best thing that could have happened to them. He had all the normal delight in the prospect of fatherhood.

But Moira was not so easily reconciled. She would always look upon that baby as something a little too unreasonably expensive. She was not ready for it, and had the plan of going abroad been broached earlier she would never have had it. She would have been more pleased had Miles not tried so hard to make her see it in a better light. She did not doubt his sincerity, nor that he would be one whose joy in children of his own would be unbounded. But she hated to think of his taking one burden after another from her shoulders until he would be carrying them all, while she waited helplessly. She had never thought him, as yet, strong enough without her.

So she did not relinquish her burdens until she had to. She worked on, until the last day she could without embarrassment. After a season of careful figuring she estimated that what they had saved, with Miles' salary (which had been slightly increased not long before) would enable them to maintain their present comforts until she got back to earning. She hoped that could be managed somehow within two years.

But if the idea of having a child was an adventure, they both had to admit that the conditions it called for were somewhat depressing.

For one thing, they had to have more space. The first work she did after leaving Barcroft's establishment was to move to a flat in the eighties on the west side. In every particular this place lacked the charm of her studio, nor could anything they did to it or put into it make it seem the same. The little kennel-like separations called rooms were diabolically invented for people who had to have children, and so constructed as to make them hate the fact that they had them.

At the earliest hint of the baby's coming she noticed changes in Miles. He had never been very regular or responsible about office hours. Now it worried him if he was a half minute late in getting started. He talked less, he exaggerated less. He seemed to be unwilling to discuss books, or any of the old subjects that had enthralled him. He spoke much of there being a future "in the firm," for a chap who "really buckled down and dug up results." She realized that he was beginning to regard his job as a permanent support.

He came home sometimes with bundles of papers filled with figures and sat in the little study at night, writing what he called "plans" and "copy" and making "market analyses." It was the same sort of jargon that Barcroft talked incessantly—"sales and distribution," "consumer demand," and "dealer helps." It had sounded all right from Barcroft; but from Miles . . .

She found among his papers rough drafts in his own hand of advertisements extolling the value of hog foods, lice powder, piston rings—and one long story about "How I raised my salary from fifty to two hundred dollars a week in six months." When she read these she went into her room and cried. They had meant nothing to her so long as he took them lightly; now that he applied his whole mind to them and sat absently dreaming of them, they seemed blasphemous. But she dared not complain; she had no remedy to offer.

In a little while—after the baby was a few months old—he began to bring home news of certain results from all this energy and absorption. His salary took a sudden jump. He was "meeting clients" continually, doing executive work. Soon, he told her, he would have a small office to himself. She simulated pleasure at these announcements, but she felt none. Every triumph of that sort meant a surrender of himself. She even resented the care he had begun to take in his clothes and his hair-cuts, the change in his style of dress.

The ugliness of the little apartment in a building which held perhaps fifty tiresome families, the dreary parade of bourgeois virtues, and fourth or fifth rate finery, the strident female voices in the street and halls, the newness of everything one touched and looked at, the lack of shadows and mystery and ease, the pervasive, obvious travail

for money—all these things were to Moira an education in American life which her youth had escaped. She disliked them, but she regarded them, because they were strange to her, with a detached, half-amused curiosity.

To Miles, however, they were a return to the hated past—from just such a street in Cincinnati he had fled in horror years before. She saw that it really involved him; that daily, as it were, he had to brush its overwhelming effect from his clothes and from his mind. It was she who was putting him through all this. . . . And it was only an added irony that Miles, junior, turned out such a satisfactory child, normal and vigorous and good-tempered. It did not improve matters any that he deserved this sacrifice, for with every new fascination he exerted, every delightful characteristic he exhibited, the subjection of all their hopes to his demands became more complete. . . .

Three years passed this way, and though the affairs of the Harlindew family went on quite as ever in outward appearance, much had happened underneath to both.

In the first place she had learned that a child was not a temporary encumbrance, one that she could throw off in a year or two for outside work. If certain of its wants diminished with its growth, others increased, and the habit of being an attendant mother became fixed. She had had to

abandon her plan of returning to offices. Cheap servant girls and the risk run in trusting them worried her too much as it was. She became as helpless a house-person as the scores of other young mothers in her teeming block.

With the relinquishment of this notion came the gradual realization that they might never be able to take up again that shoulder to shoulder independence which had seemed so fine while it lasted. Miles from now on was the provider—she and her child the dependents. She discovered that he had seen this more clearly than she from the beginning.

He ceased to take an interest in himself at all. His mind settled into a hopeless groove of dogged, disinterested work. To see him pick up a book and lay it aside was a gesture that came to hold a veritable sense of tragedy for her. To watch the effect of a fine play upon him was pathetic. While its beauty filled him with happiness, he dared not allow himself to be lifted too far into that rarified atmosphere. He ventured no opinions about any of the hundreds of stimulating personalities who were coming up on the horizon of culture everywhere. Poetry he spoke of with whimsical condescension, even with contempt. It seemed to him an impudent excrescence, a meaningless dream that had no right to existence in a life of reality.

All this came more swiftly than she knew, oc-

cupied as she was with the absorbing bit of life under her care. In three years she thought she scarcely knew Miles. The poems he had shown her that night before the baby's coming were often in her hands, though she dared not mention them to him. They were as fine as they had been then. Could this plodding man—who loved her still with a desperate, clinging love, a love, as it seemed, that was the breath of his life—be the same man who had written them? And was it possible that he must stop that divine occupation for no other reason than that three people had to live? The future seems short when life is meaningless and tiresome, and we become seized with a fierce impatience. Moira fought against a feeling that they were old and life was declining to its end. . . .

An ominous fact was apparent. In spite of Harlindew's devotion to work at the office he was achieving very little. He had reached a certain point and come to a standstill. His salary, large according to the ideas with which he had begun, was a dwindling insufficiency when it came to paying their bills. He was beginning to be afraid that he might never go farther. She remembered now a saying that Barcroft had repeated to her: "Push may start behind, but it's got brains beat all hollow in the end." He was referring to the kind of brains Miles had, theoretic and literary. Miles himself tried to explain his predicament in

words of much the same import. There was a "point of saturation," he said, in salaries and advancement, unless you "got outside and went after the business." Apparently that was what he could not do.

At the same time, an incredible number of new expenses, roundly chargeable to the item named "baby" had absorbed all their early savings except a few hundred dollars, which she jealously kept—not so much in fear of an emergency, as with the hope that it might be the magic key to open the door to some way out of their life. But she went into this treasure to buy Miles decent business suits. They were both behind in similar comforts and vanities.

Harlindew seemed to resent any invasion of his evenings, to prefer to sit with her and his thoughts. Yet in reality he was full of an enormous restlessness to which he dared not surrender. The office needed all his energy; he could not spend it. So he thought. . . . Moira would take the bored man out whenever her maid would stay, trying to revive the spirit of their old comradeship. It came to life only in rare flashes.

Her twenty-eighth year passed. She found herself with more freedom on her hands now, and she obtained work from Elsie Jennings which brought in a few dollars a week. She was not sure which feeling was uppermost in Miles, his pleasure at seeing the money or his disgust

at finding her painting silly gift cards. Her painting, the fact that she had always kept it up to some extent, was his consolation, a vicarious substitute for his own emptiness. . . . But the money made them more comfortable.

Then she discovered that she was going to have another baby. He took the announcement casually, even with a joke.

"By Jove, my dear," he said, "I'm succeeding in something, anyway."

He sat down and chuckled to himself. Three things had struck him as very funny. One was that he had never in his life pictured himself as a prolific father—like his own father; another was that he would be thirty-seven that week—and the third that he had come home to tell Moira his salary had been cut.

She dropped quickly, beseechingly beside him, disliking the sound of his laugh.

"What's the matter, darling, is it too much?"

He put his arms across her shoulders in an accustomed gesture.

"No, no, dear. How absurd. I'm as glad as I can be."

He laughed again, attempting naturalness, and ruffled his hair with a sudden motion of his hand. But she felt the husband slipping from her grasp, turning defiantly before her eyes into the vagrant poet. . . .

XXI

They moved again, the landlord uptown having raised the rent at the expiration of their lease. The new place was in two large, bare rooms four stories up, lighted by gas, and without any kitchen except a small gas stove in a corner and some shelves concealed by a wall-board screen. There was a dilapidated bathroom, and a roof above where she could take the children in good weather. The place was in the Italian quarter and was cheap. The move seemed a logical one to Moira, for it brought them down in the social scale. If they were to be poor, it was better to live with the poor than with the pretentious. And the Italian section was in the Village, of which they had both become incurably fond, and where for many reasons they felt most comfortable.

The house was managed by an Italian woman named Respetti, who had once done odd jobs of sewing for Moira and for whom she felt a strong liking. Mrs. Respetti had appeared to be quite overjoyed to see her again, delighted to hear of her marriage and her children, and had offered to help her look after them when she could. Her willingness in this regard was the deciding factor in Moira's choice of the house.

She had not been installed there more than a few weeks when Miles finally lost his job outright, an event she had anticipated almost any day since before the birth of her little girl. He made efforts to obtain work of the same kind, but unsuccessfully. He got books for review. He did what ever came along. One day he brought her a check signed by his father. He began shortly afterwards to be somewhat worse than idle, and sought forgetfulness of his troubles in a way to increase them. . . . .

Moira had lived to see three men in him: the skylarking poet, the dogged misfit in business, and finally the self-drugged and nearly self-convinced failure. And still the vision of the first one haunted her and she hoped to bring it back to life.

Left to herself, she made friendships in the Village and built up her own income to fairly respectable proportions. She was, at least, preserved from downright anxiety about the children. In her youth at Thornhill, had she witnessed the privations and makeshifts which now made up her life she would have thought them a chapter out of some incredible tale of human misfortune.

One night when she had waited late for Miles and he had not come, she went to Sophie's Kitchen.

This was a dimly lighted little restaurant, with two rows of board tables down each wall, and an exotically foreign air, where the food was well-

flavoured and not so expensive as in most of the show places of the section. She was very fond of Sophie, the proprietress, a whole-souled woman, discriminating in her intimates, with a soft, pleasing voice, and remarkably long, narrow hazel eyes.

As Moira seated herself at one of the tables she was conscious of a fashionable party across the room. Such people were not unusual in Sophie's and she paid little attention to them. She saw the handsome proprietress in the open pantry at the back of the room and waved to her with a cry of greeting. Sophie replied by calling her name. Immediately afterward, Moira looked up to see a man coming toward her from the group she had spotted upon entering. He reached her table and thrust out his hand.

"Well, Rob Blaydon!" she cried.

"Moira."

She had recognized him at once, but she looked him over more carefully as he sat down opposite her. He was stouter. She found herself experiencing a sensation she had never known before, that of meeting a youthful companion grown mature in her absence, one she was fond of. It wasn't such an extraordinary sensation. It might have been only a few days ago when she was seeing Rob constantly. Nothing happened to people at all. Perhaps his face had changed a little, but whatever change there was she would have ex-

pected. Yes, she felt he was an even more wicked and human Rob than before.

"I'll tell you what, Moira," he went on at once. "I don't care what you've got on hand to-night, you've got to spend the evening with me. If you will wait just a minute I'll get away from these people on some pretext. I've simply got to talk to you, Moira. What do you say?"

"Go ahead, Rob, if you want to. I'd love it," she replied with unaffected pleasure.

He came back in a few moments.

"Evidently they are used to your whims," she said. "They don't seem to mind."

"Forget 'em," he replied, with a clipped ruthlessness she remembered well.

The two women had in fact glanced at her curiously and critically, but she did not care. They were certainly a very smart party. She wondered what they would think if they knew that she, too, not so many years ago, had worn the clothes they were wearing and cultivated their dry, sophisticated smiles. It appeared to her now a diluted and uninteresting sophistication. . . .

"Moira," he was saying, "I've got to know all about you. I'm hungry for information. You don't look any younger. But you don't look any the worse, either. What wouldn't they give back home to be with me now!"

"Rob, it's good to see you!"

"Honest? Well, I'm certainly glad you feel

that way. Still, I always knew you'd be just the same. Why did you do it, Moira? Why in the devil did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Oh, all that—rot. It was silly, Moira. You're one of us, to this day. Always will be, you know. Who cared?"

She laughed a few notes of warm laughter that was still a clear stream free from the sediment of bitterness.

"I never think of that any more. Perhaps it was silly. But I've been happier."

"H'm." She was conscious that his eyes searched her face, and rather proud that what he found there would make it impossible to pity her. "H'm," he repeated, "well, maybe you have. I guess you know a lot."

"How are they, Rob? I'd like to see them all. I really would. Goodness, it's been ten years! How's Hal?"

There was no challenge in the tone—it was just a natural question.

"You haven't heard about Hal? Well, Hal is in China. Been there for six years and I reckon he won't come home. You know he looked high and low for you—thought he was going out of his mind. There were difficulties, you understand, or perhaps you counted on them. Fear of publicity—truth leaking out—abduction—shouting

your name from the house-tops. But he wore himself out. Then one night he came home, and broke down. Well, he told me he guessed it was better the way it turned out—that he admired you and knew you'd never be moved. Thought after what happened you'd never feel right. My God, you high and mighty idealists!"

"Is he happy?"

"I don't know. Hal and I were always so confounded different, it's hard for me to get him. He wasn't cut out to be happy or the opposite. He's turned out one of those quiet, square-jawed gumps, Moira. I met him in Paris two years ago, and we had a rotten dull time of it. I suppose he'll mope around the Orient the rest of his life, working for corporations, get richer and richer and marry somebody's sister equally rich. Now, I'm another breed of coyote. I'm always satisfied when I have a clean shirt on. It's the thoughtless life I like."

"I'm sorry Hal isn't happy," said Moira ruefully.

"I wouldn't be sorry about him!" snapped Rob. "Damn it, Moira, I don't say you weren't clever as the devil. But if Hal had been me I'd have found you."

"You're the same Rob!" she laughed. "You know, of course, you're the only one of them I could have run into this way and talked to com-

fortably. And the others—how are they? Your father I"—she dropped her voice—"read about in the papers."

"Poor Dad. He must have felt he was buncoed sometime or other in his life. He tried to overcrowd the last few years. I think Aunt Mathilda felt he went off about in time. . . . Those two old women—I mean your mother, Moira, and my aunt. It's a curious friendship that's grown up between them. They keep that big house together and think mostly about cows and flowers—and old times."

She did not reply to that nor look at him directly. She was glad when he burst out in a more immediate vein.

"Well, what do you say to a night of it? I find it's a dull world, Moira. You may have more money than I have, and it may bore you to do the bright lights . . . but that's my form of entertainment. However, I'm only going to do what you say. It's your night. But I don't imagine you want me to take you to church!"

"I haven't money," she answered, smiling. "I never have a night of it, Rob. I'd love one."

"Good! Come on."

"No. I want you to wait here while I change. These clothes won't do."

"Just as you say. But can't I take you—wherever it is you go to change your clothes?"

"What's the use?" she queried, tentatively, as

much to herself as to him. "No, I'd rather you wouldn't."

"Just as you say."

"Rob, you're a dear. In fifteen minutes I'll be back. Meantime you talk to Sophie. Oh, Sophie," she called, and while she waited for Sophie to come, she added, "Sophie will like you fine. She might even put you on the poor list."

"What's that?"

"Sophie has a sliding scale of prices. But that's a secret."

Moira's one black evening gown was rather old, but she felt extraordinarily happy as she stepped out of the restaurant a little later on his arm. The sweet, leathery smell of the taxicab's interior held almost a new shiver for her. How long it had been since she had smelled that with a good conscience and seen the lights of the little squares and the upper Avenue slip by like a single glittering chain, to the slinky whirr of wheels. She looked forward to the evening for itself—its adventure in colours—and for Rob. She begged him not to ask her questions, not until they had had a few dances and found a quiet corner after the fun.

"I see," he said. "You're starved for a fling—even if you won't let on."

"I am—with you."

"No kidding? But I guess you always did like me pretty well. You used to be my only cham-

pion. And I needed one often. Well, I'm an unrepentant sinner."

After dining they took in a part of the Follies and then went to dance. It was the same, she found, here as it had been at home. Whenever they stopped, at the Tom-Tom and La Fleur de Nuit, he was known and served like the old-timers. She begged him to go on drinking while she skipped, and he did so without apology, explaining that it was his forte. She wondered at his power of absorbing continuously without the trembling of an eyelash. It pleased her to meet admiring eyes, and be asked to dance by his friends.

He steered her afterward to a place furnished like a very intimate club, where they sat in deep armchairs under dim lights and had scrambled eggs and bacon on little French stands. There she took a long Scotch highball and told him something of herself.

"Moira," he said. "It's a weird sensation to listen to such a tale from you. You belong in this sort of thing." He indicated the too elegant room.

She rose to go.

"It's better fun to feel you belong in the whole crazy world. I wonder if you do?"

She laughed and then added with a sudden burst of bravado: "Rob, I'd like to take you home

and let you see my kids. I'd like to to-night. Could you come?''

''Yep. I get a train out of here at nine in the morning and there's more than six hours to make it.''

She felt it was an odd experience for him climbing up the dark, gas-lit stairs. She led him back to the cribs with candelabra in her hand, and he looked longest at the blond-haired little Joanna, seeing in her broad, upturned, warm face some misty resemblance to his earliest vision of her mother.

''They're great kids, Moira. But I won't bluff —I like 'em all best when they're asleep.''

They came out into the shadowy, haphazard studio, and she knew he felt uneasy and shocked at her surroundings.

''Well,'' he said coolly, ''of course you're going to let me help you. I've got plenty—more than is good for me—and nobody has more right to it than you. If you say so, I'll ditch that train tomorrow and have you out of here by noon with the children, into a comfortable place.''

''No, sir,'' she laughed.

''But, my God!'' he protested, and then added severely. ''Moira, I told you early in the evening you looked none the worse for everything. . . . But you do—you look peaked. You're fagged.''

''Who wouldn't be, after a night of it with you!

No, no, you dear boy. But we'll have a night of it again."

"Thanks for that."

"And only with you, Rob," she continued, with emphasis. He caught the hint that he was to keep the secret of her whereabouts.

"Just as you say. I shan't talk. But I'm going to get you out of this, somehow, sometime. I can't tell you where to reach me, to-night, except that Thornhill does, in a roundabout way. I'm going to locate in the East in a few days and you'll hear from me. I'm going now. There's no use talking, Moira, this pulls me down"—he made a gesture with his hand about the room and then added apologetically—"Don't be offended. It's just because it happens to be you."

As he stood awkwardly, with hat and stick under one arm, he took out a long box of cigarettes and threw it on the table.

"At least let me give you those," he said with a sheepish grin.

"Rob, please don't worry about me," she pleaded. She stepped toward the table to take a cigarette from the box he had thrown down, but his outstretched arm stopped her.

"Here," he said, offering his opened case, "take one of these. . . . Moira, you're the woman who makes all my conceptions about the sex go blooey. Damn it, I wish I were Harold. I wish I had some prior rights in the matter."

"You've more rights this minute than Hal," she said firmly.

After he had gone she sat puffing smoke into the dim upper reaches of the room, and watching the petals of candlelight waver and dip. What fun it had been! Life held strange meetings. Perhaps it held many more for her. She was a little unhappy, dissatisfied . . . the place did look dismal, unclean, comfortless.

In the morning she found Miles pacing the studio waiting for her to rise. He was nervous and evasive, but in better shape than she had expected to see him. Obviously, he had done his recovering elsewhere, and bathed while she slept. She kissed him, her quarrel with him lost in pleasant afterthoughts of the night before, but he seemed troubled and strange. At breakfast, he suddenly asked:

"What the devil is this?"

"What?"

He tossed a Pall Mall cigarette box across the table and she opened it. The silver paper was folded carefully over the top. Between it and the bottom layer of cigarettes lay five one hundred dollar bills.

"It's a long story," she said, recovering from her surprise. Then she told him about Rob. He stood up to go after she had finished.

"Well," he said, with some embarrassment, "I do hope you feel it's a perfectly natural thing

for a fellow to open a box of cigarettes lying around on a table. I mean to say—''

''Nonsense. I should have done it myself.''

Miles left her, to go to his accumulated work, bitterly, she knew, and more completely convinced of his uselessness. She sat down to try to think out what was to be done. The owner of the five hundred had taken his train long ago. She did not know where to reach him, and if she did, it would be downright mean to send the money back. She remembered how he had prevented her from opening the box before he had left her. The money was not there by accident. Rob was her schoolboy friend. Perhaps she was only giving herself an excuse, but what good would her self-righteousness do to temper the hurt she knew he would feel? She would accept his gift simply and with thanks. Besides, she had a plan. On the children's account, on Miles', on her own, she had long been wanting to put it into execution. This money would enable her to do so, beautifully and without a hitch.

XXII

In the open country near a southern village of Connecticut, not over a brisk morning's walk to the Sound, sat a smallish farmhouse which was probably a century old. It was an innocent and ordinary enough looking house from the road. It topped a swell of land that was somewhat higher than its immediate surroundings and bare of large trees except for a single magnificent elm half way between the house and the road. The lawn was allowed to grow wild, but nearer the house and covering the approach to its graceful old doorway were several shrubs in more or less cultivated condition placed on a few feet of clipped sod. In the spring the lawn and the fields which rolled out downward from the house were thickly starred with buttercups whose tiny yellow bowls glistened like lacquered buttons in the sun. Later the same meadows turned to a waving lake of red clover.

Potter Osprey, when upbraided by his friends for not making more of his handful of acres, declared he was no gardener. He could neither adorn nature nor gain his feed from her by his own hands, for she was a wild beast whose moods and colours and contours he had struggled with

all his life, and there was no quarter between them. To all offers to prettify her in his immediate neighbourhood he was politely deaf. He wanted her rugged and plain as his plastic, solid canvases liked to interpret her, and that way he could love her as one loves a worthy foe.

On the house itself he had lavished more care. Eight years of his own proprietorship had made it, without any great loss of its ancient character, a place of personal charm inside. In the rear the hill fell sharply from the foundation, and here he had built up a broad concrete terrace, looking northward to an unbroken view of horizon and low hills. Above the terrace for ten or twelve feet in height and almost as wide, rose a vertical sheet of heavy, transparent glass in narrow panels, and this gave light to a large room, which had been made by knocking out walls and upper flooring so that half of it was two stories high. The house practically consisted of this room, a cellar under it, and some small bedrooms above. Outhouse and kitchen stepped away to the west.

From Osprey's north terrace could be seen a smaller house on the eastern slope, nestling in a very old, gnarled and worn-out orchard. Some of its trees reminded one of those anatomical designs in physiological books; they were half bare-branched skeleton and half green, waving body.

To the larger house Moira Harlindew came one morning in answer to an advertisement in a New

York paper, describing a "small, furnished house in the country with conveniences."

She was admitted by the painter himself, a man of medium height, who showed his fifty years more in his figure, his careless gait, and the way he wore his old clothes, than in the face, which was of no definite age, so Moira thought. What lines had been worn upon it made the man seem more youthful. The eyes were candid and reposeful, but extremely responsive to passing moods. This she detected in his look of anxiety as he first opened the door for her, and in the evident relief that followed his swift inspection. The mouth, under a gray wisp of moustache that tended to turn upwards at the ends, slanted a bit so that more than half of the smile was on one side. There was a suggestion of the satirical in it. Yet Moira found the face, on the whole, a pleasant one to look at, especially when he had recovered his composure and was welcoming her.

"Come in," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I've come to see the house for rent."

"Good. You're early. I hardly expected any answers to-day before noon. It's quite a little way to come from the city, you know. By the way. I'm at my breakfast. Suppose you come along and sit down while I finish. Do you mind?"

He led her into the studio and she sank into a large chair, a little tired after the long, warm walk

from the station. She felt instantly and completely happy. The big room, with its cool, even light, its smell of wood and paint, and its thousand and one objects familiar and dear to her trade, drove everything else from her mind, even the anxiety she had felt lest the place be taken—for it was Monday morning and all day Sunday had elapsed since she had seen the advertisement. He noticed her fatigue and glanced at her dusty shoes.

"You've walked up," he exclaimed, surprised. "Well, perhaps you will join me." He sat down before a low table which gleamed with silver and yellow china. "Coffee? My morning tipple is tea, but Nana always has some coffee because she loves it herself."

"If you really have it," said Moira, "I'd like some coffee."

A large, impassive negress soon served her.

"It isn't much of a house you're going to see," he went on. "I call it the orchard bungalow and it is nearly as decrepit as the orchard itself. But it will shed the rain."

"And it's not taken?" asked Moira warmly.

"Well, no—not exactly. But I'm afraid it's too—well, unpretentious for you."

"It couldn't be that," she laughed. As he finished his toast her gaze went on embracing the room with frank pleasure, and she was aware he took sly glances at her.

"Do you paint?" he asked suddenly.

Moira had been afraid of the question. Though her host had only given his last name she had read it on pictures in the studio, and knew now that he was an American painter of reputation whose work she had worried over at various exhibitions. She felt extremely humble, but her fear arose from the suspicion that a successful painter might object to having irresponsible and immature dabblers running about in his near neighbourhood. She could not hide in the immediate safety of a lie. Eventually that would be found out, though it tempted her.

"I'm just a student," she replied, and went on quickly, "but the real reason I want a country place is because I've two young children. Do you mind that? I'm sure they will not bother you."

"Not at all," he said cordially. "On the contrary . . . However," he added, rising, "I think we had better look at this humble dwelling before you grow too enthusiastic, my dear young lady."

As Moira had entered the place, her mind's eye had pictured the four-year-old Miles playing among those buttercups, and learning things he might never get to know if he grew much older in the city. Now every step confirmed her in the desire to live here at any cost. The nostalgia for Thornhill which she had felt in many a solitary hour during these last ten years, together with a

flood of early memories, swept over her. The orchard, upon which a few apple blossoms lingered, was enchantingly old and weird. Standing in the high grass beneath it one could see a pattern of winding stone fences crisscrossing the fields, and up a near-by hill danced three pale birches like a trio of white-legged girls with green veils trailing about them. Even a bit of decayed brown board by the path made her sentimental. She wanted to run after a butterfly or to lie full length in the grass of the meadow, letting the sun drink her up. . . .

The house was small, but a moment's speculation and mental rearrangement convinced her that it was adequate. She and the genial owner found themselves making plans together for the comfort of the Harlindew family.

"I don't see what you are going to do with your maid," said he, "unless she sleeps on the couch out here in the sitting room."

"I sha'n't have a maid," Moira replied, and he looked at her with another of his glances of wondering curiosity.

"But," he began, and then stopped, thinking better of what he had intended to say. "Well, there's my Nana. She often has time lying heavy on her hands and she doesn't object to an occasional extra fee. No doubt she can help you."

"Oh, that will be splendid," she cried. The suggestion did solve a minor problem in her mind,

but she had no patience just now with minor problems. "I love the old furniture you have in here."

"Most of it was here when I came, in the house up above. I made one room out of three when I built the studio, and these are the handful of pieces I could not use. If you haven't enough, there are a few more odds and ends stored away."

"You're going to let me take it, then?" asked Moira breathlessly.

He seemed surprised at the question, as though the matter had been settled between them, and then laughed.

"I'll tell you the truth now, Mrs. Harlindew. There have been several other applicants but I put them off somehow—I didn't like any of them. . . . But!" he exclaimed suddenly—"but my dear girl! Well, well!"

She was crying after all, as she had feared she would in the orchard, ten minutes before. Tears that she could not keep back rolled down her smiling cheeks. . . .

XXIII

Moira's hope had been that their move to the country would bring Miles to his senses. With nothing to do but rest and lose himself in the beauty and peace of outdoors, with not even the responsibility, for some months at least, to earn any money, she confidently believed he would drop the habits which had regained their hold upon him of late, get possession of his impulse to work, and begin to write the things of which she dreamed he was capable. And in the beginning each day after they arrived confirmed her hope. He seemed to cast heavy burdens from his shoulders and his mind, to love spending hours with the children, romping and making the place merry with their laughter and his. From time to time he wandered off alone with his pockets stuffed with paper, boyishly promising great results, or stayed up with the lamp at night. When they had been there no more than ten days it seemed already a long time ago that their lives had changed and taken a turn for the better. She was for that ten days serenely happy.

Then the country began to pall on Miles. He grew restless and evasive; at breakfast he would hint at various reasons for going to New York. When their second week end came around he man-

aged a convincing excuse and disappeared with a small handbag full of over-night clothing.

Moira's heart sank at this unexpected turn of affairs, and she spent the days in his absence giving way to more real despair than she had ever known with him. This time she had done her best, done what a little while ago she would have thought impossible, and she had failed. . . .

He seemed to come back passionately eager to see her, and so long as he did that she could only surrender to him and see in him still her lover and her first lover, her lover for all time. But these waves of passion died away; her presence and the children's began to irk him in a day or two, sometimes in a few hours, and it soon appeared to her that he regarded a week as an interminable visit.

She set herself to observing him, to studying his chance remarks, and for the first time a genuine doubt of his fidelity oppressed her. There was nothing tangible, except his trips to the city, to justify this suspicion, and these would have been inadequate despite his evasions. She could quite naturally think of him as being restless, as wanting to go away, without dreaming that he would belie her faith in him. The suspicion of infidelity came before the evidence, but once the suspicion was lodged in her mind, the evidence, all unconsciously furnished by Miles, piled up by little and little.

She saw that this warmth of love-making with which he returned to her did not last an hour. Bitter thoughts assailed her. Evidently he was not always successful with his hypothetical sweetheart or sweethearts and was driven back to his wife. She could not keep fantastic exaggerations out of her head, though in her sober moments she told herself that the truth, if probably serious, was far less florid than she imagined.

Nevertheless, there grew upon her an increasing repugnance toward his advances. She made no issue of it. She did not want conflict. He was very appealing, very hard on her sympathies, very skilful in inventions. She could not quickly forget that he had suffered and struggled while he still loved her. But her inescapable conclusion, reached in hours of cold reflection, was that they were parting; that sooner or later an end would come. She determined not to invite it so long as her pride was not sacrificed; to wait for it sensibly and coolly.

Another explanation of Miles' conduct brought a curious sort of consolation and corrective. This was that he simply wanted to be free—but did not have the strength. The opportunity had been placed in his way to leave, and, feeling himself ultimately unequal to marriage and its burdens and limitations, he believed he ought to take it. His love still held him tenuously to her and the children, his sentiment for their past together,

his need for a woman's support—whatever it was —and he could not find the courage to make the break. He had probably been strengthened in entertaining this purpose by the knowledge that somebody had turned up from Thornhill, and she would be taken care of. Much as that base notion offended her, this last theory was frankly pleasing. It was better than the thought of betrayal with another woman.

By the time she had reached this state of enlightenment she was so skilled in reading poor Miles' motives that she felt as though she had acquired supernatural powers of clairvoyance. The summer was more than half gone.

But she had not thought exclusively of Miles. She had the children to care for and teach a whole new set of fascinating things, and she had her painting. The opportunity presented by these untrammelled days was not to be lost over heart-burnings, and a new power and certainty had come to her. She wasted less time carrying her attempts to the last degree of finish. She was trying by experiment after experiment to get the feel and solidity of the earth and to express her warm daily contact with it.

She had been very timid toward Osprey where painting was concerned. She had resolved never to speak to him about it and to keep out of his way while she was at it. One ought not to expect to rent the cottage of a famous painter and have

advice thrown in. But it was he who sought her in the orchard one morning and made comments for which she was grateful, because she understood them and could profit by them, and also because they were not uncomplimentary.

"Most of us," he said, "gamble frightfully in choosing art as a career. That's why there are so many hopeless artists. We mistake an urge for a talent, and the devil of it is there is no sure way of knowing whether we're on the right road or not. But I think you are. In the first place you have the steady enthusiasm and not just mere plugging industry. In the second place you are a self-teacher. Everybody worth a hang is that."

They were the first really golden words she had ever heard, and she was certain afterward that simply hearing them had improved her work miraculously—made her surer of the knowledge she had gained and helped her to discard excrescences.

Osprey had few visitors. Perhaps twice a year a gathering of extraordinary individuals with whom he had consorted at various periods and in many parts of the world crowded into the house, took possession of it, kept up a racket until morning and departed, leaving him with a few more intimate cronies, some to recover from the effects and others simply to prolong the reunion. These entertainments occurred usually in the early spring or fall, the seasons of change when people

come together most spontaneously. And they were spontaneous. He had no use for set affairs.

On rare occasions women drove out to see him, for luncheon or tea; and he himself went to town about once a month, seldom remaining longer than over night. He seemed to have cultivated not only the love of solitude, but the power to enjoy it for long periods.

There was one visitor, however, who arrived often. Moira saw his heavy blue roadster drawn up beside the lawn three times during the first month of her stay, and she wondered who the impressive man was, with short grey curly hair, and the easy bearing of accomplishment. She was not surprised to learn later that he was somebody—no less a person, in fact, than Emmet Roget, the producer, a man who was both a power in the business phase of the theatre and an artistic radical in his own right.

The friendship between these two men appeared to be less extraordinary now than it had been in past years, but it was still a friendship in which a certain inequality was apparent. The rôle of Roget toward Osprey, during three fourths of their adult lives, had been that of a detached but watchful guardian. A dozen years ago Osprey had been something of a riderless horse, a centre of explosions, the victim of unexpected mishaps and misunderstandings, constantly involved with a woman, and taking his affairs with desperate

seriousness, careless of his talent and his time. Much of this relationship he skilfully suggested to her himself, in his humorously philosophic moments.

As he put it, he was born somewhere between his thirty-eighth and his fortieth year, and began to live his life in a sense backward; for though he went on having experiences it was always something in his life before his thirty-eighth year that he seemed to be living over in these experiences, and relishing where he previously had suffered. The actual occasion of the change had been a painful separation from the last of his devastating loves, and more or less complete celibacy since. The result was a fresh joy in work, a really enormous volume of production . . . peace and contentment and plenty.

The life of Emmet Roget had been exactly the antithesis. He was penniless in his youth. No sooner had he reached New York—to which initial step Osprey had assisted him—than he began to have means for his needs. At twenty-nine he left Europe, after having immersed himself in as much of French culture as an able young foreigner can obtain with diligence and enthusiasm, and studied the beginnings of the German theatre movement. A season was spent directing a Denver "little theatre," but the provinces offered too little future and freedom. Once more in New York, Roget was designing sets and directing pro-

ductions. In his late thirties he was instituting new methods into the theatre which were hailed and copied abroad.

Many regarded Emmet Roget as primarily a "man for the future," yet to him the present seemed invariably kind. Unlike his friend, nothing touched him; but whatever he touched gained from his personality, took on fascination and beauty. Hard at the core, immovable and unimpressionable, he was yet acutely sensitive, capable of profound appreciations, for music, for colour, for a scene, a woman—and surprisingly human in his contacts. No doubt it was this intuitive appreciation, coupled with early friendship, which had made him cling to Osprey through many hopeless seasons and experiments.

The first two or three times that Roget visited him that summer, Osprey did not refer to his new tenants except casually. Later, however, when he had had a half dozen talks with Moira, he introduced the subject to his friend at the dinner table.

"That's rather a remarkable young woman I've got down there in the orchard," he said. "Did I tell you that she painted?"

"I believe so—something of the kind," replied Roget. He had met with his share of disillusionment among his own protégés, and he was not given to more than passing interest in the mere fact that a young woman painted.

"Well," pursued Osprey, "I've got something to show you after dinner."

When they had finished he led the producer to a picture on the studio wall and switched on a light he had put up to illuminate it.

"That's one of hers," he said. "I think there are extraordinarily good things in it as well as bad. At all events, I liked it so well I bought it."

Roget studied the picture for a moment, but without enthusiasm.

"Yes," he said. "Obviously you've influenced her already, or she's known your work for some time."

"I don't think it's so obvious," protested the other. "There's personal insight in that modelling, and it has a back to it. Anyway, she's young. Fact is, there's something really unusual about the girl. I fancy she had things her own way at one time. The marks are there, overlaid by experience since."

"Of course," laughed Roget quietly, "it makes a difference if you know the young lady."

"Hang it, my dear fellow, the girl is poor. Has two children, and a husband who may be talented and may be a fool. But he's certainly no support."

"Charity and art do not mix, old man."

"The hell they don't," replied Osprey testily. "But as you say, one must see for oneself. You

are going to make Mrs. Harlindew's acquaintance, and whatever you think of charity, you will buy a picture from her as a favour to me. Not too soon, you understand, and not too obtrusively. She shied at me frightfully when I bought this one. I had to tell her that I had made quite a collection of the work of promising beginners for reasons of my own."

Roget found his friend nearly always transparent. Ten years ago he would have said there was considerably more than the mere fervour of the artist in this championship. But he had since become acquainted with a wholly new side of the man, and it was difficult to believe him capable of losing his head over a pretty bride who happened to rent his house.

"You say she is married?" he contented himself with asking, dryly.

A flicker of humorous comprehension passed over the other's face.

"Yes," he replied shortly, "but the fellow neglects her."

Roget's manner became once more indulgent.

"Well, I shall try to buy this picture. I don't know what to do with it after I get it. There are mighty few pictures worth buying. Perhaps not more than twenty in the world."

He dismissed the subject and sat down at Osprey's piano. His study of the instrument had come late, in young manhood. Lacking any great

musical scholarship or conventional training, he nevertheless played whatever he had heard that pleased him, with extraordinary tenderness and effect.

XXIV

For Moira the summer grew increasingly fruitful, and, in a reflective way, full of satisfactions, despite the continued absences of Miles. A profound sympathy came over her, which she did not remember to have experienced before, for the average discontented wife, who had to endure this sort of thing with empty hands and no refuge of the spirit in which to lose herself. . . . That could never be the case with her.

It is true that she would have been less serene were it not for the fact that she had found companionship that answered a real want. Osprey had none of the qualifications of the teacher, and his criticisms struck deep. If she had been younger and greener they might only have puzzled and not helped her, but now she welcomed surgery and destruction. Her own hard years of unaided application rendered her capable of understanding his language remarkably well, and she was ready to discard and forget everything she had ever known.

Their discussions were often continued after brushes were laid aside. She accepted invitations to tea in the studio or sat on his terrace on warm nights after the children were asleep. The long

drawn out culmination of her relationship to Miles had given her the habit of self-analysis, and she laughed somewhat over the appeal that Osprey made to her as a man. She could not deny that it was the same that originally had drawn her to her husband. She dealt here with a greater Miles, wiser and more experienced. Nevertheless, she sensed in him the type that was not self-sufficient, that required sympathy of a subtle kind, and required it, when found, with an intensity that in this case was beginning to prove hypnotic to her. Unquestionably Potter Osprey was gradually becoming a necessary part of her life, and this was not her fault but his. She had hinted at, more than revealed, the state of affairs between herself and Miles. It was impossible not to do so, appearances being what they were; and the older man's complete understanding coupled with hesitation to advise, was a soothing remedy to her hurts.

The attraction which was growing between herself and Osprey was totally different from her feeling for his friend, Roget, with whom she had become acquainted. The distinguished producer treated her with bantering equality from the start. It was as if they recognized a likeness to each other in essential strength, and the hesitation, almost anxiety, which Roget had felt over the painter's passionate adoption of Moira's cause disappeared on knowing her. He began to think

of the whole affair as a pleasant and lasting alliance for his friend, of some sort, and he little doubted of what sort it would be. Obstacles there were, which he did not concern himself with. Once a possibility took life in Roget's brain, obstacles did not exist. He had seen too many large ones swept aside.

To Moira, the obstacles were more significant, and yet they had diminished amazingly in the last three months. The prospect that Osprey would take their friendship seriously did have about it a quality of dark adventure which made even her steady pulses jump uncomfortably. But to the young woman who sees her marriage being slowly broken up before her eyes, while she is helpless to restore it, everything is touched by the shimmer of madness. And she asked herself what could have been more mad, more out of all normal reason, than her whole life? Moreover, she had a firm support now, one that gave her the strength to adventure—her art. The intimation had visited her at last that she might triumph in it; and, having reached that certainty, she felt it a more present help than coffers heaped with gold. . . . The picture which Roget had tried to buy she laughingly refused to sell him, but he had countered with a problem in stage design which he promised to accept if it offered a suggestion to work on. Here was a beginning, at least.

Her children . . . it was strange how she felt

toward them, how little she feared for them. Certainly they were to be shielded, but also they were not to be deceived about the life into which they had been brought. The truth would not hurt them.

It was late in September that Moira received the letter from Miles saying that he had left and would not return. The letter was a mixture of unhappy self-accusation, and charges against her for various shortcomings, chief of which appeared to be that she had become self-sufficient and had accepted assistance from others. She thought he might have spared her that, as well as the taunt about her preoccupation with Osprey. . . . She had expected a parting shot of some kind, yet when it came it was a painful blow, and she spent a week brooding over it and wholly beside herself.

During this week Osprey saw nothing of her, and when she came up the hill one evening to join him, he revealed in his eagerness what the deprivation had meant. He led her to a seat, fussed about her comfort and lighted her cigarette.

"I've been ill," she said. "I go off and hide when that happens, like an animal. Now I'm well."

"Ill?" he asked, disturbed. He reflected that he should have been less squeamish and forced a visit upon her. He had never done just that. Invitations, dropped at chance meetings or at the end of discussions while they worked had been

enough. This time he had gone a little further, approached her door on an impulse twice, but stopped before making his presence known. "But," he resumed, "Nana didn't tell me about your being ill. Did she take care of you?"

Moira knew what was in his mind. While she had been ill, her husband had not been at home.

"Well," she confessed lightly, "ill is not strictly true. I've been just out of sorts. I had some news, but it doesn't matter."

"Good. I'm glad you're feeling better. Particularly, as Nana tells me, you're expecting a guest to-morrow."

"Yes, an old friend, a Mr. Blaydon. An old schoolmate, really, who has been very kind to us."

"I wonder if you wouldn't bring him and Mr. Harlindew to dinner to-morrow night? I shall be delighted to have you all; and as for Nana, she suggested it herself."

Miles had always been included in Osprey's formal invitations, whether present or not, and had, in fact, attended once and contributed not unpleasantly to the evening.

"I'm afraid I can't promise for my husband," said Moira slowly.

"H'm. That's too bad. But I can count on you and your friend, Mr. Blaydon, anyway?"

"I should love to bring him," she replied and paused. . . . It was better, she thought, to have

matters understood. . . . "My husband . . . won't come back here," she went on. "He has left me."

"It was that," he asked kindly, "the news you had?"

"Yes, he wrote me a letter."

Osprey spoke quietly but she was conscious of the emotion in his voice.

"And you will accept that? You will not seek him, try to bring him back?"

"No," she replied. "Too much has happened before this. It is over."

"You poor girl. You've suffered over it."

"I put a good deal into it. . . . But this had to happen. Miles must have no ties."

Osprey's animation returned and he spoke in a more impersonal tone.

"Perhaps you're right. I think the young man has not grown up in spite of his years. But he may find himself. They have a kind of strength, fellows like that, a kind of terrible strength that no one suspects. I've seen his type before. The fact is," he added, with a half serious smile, "I've been something of the sort myself. It's often hard to locate the origin of a fool's folly, but I think in my case it was an experience I had when I was a boy. It wasn't a peccadillo with me. It haunted me for years, so much that I can't talk freely about it to this day. It made life a desperate adventure; it was at the back of most

of my troubles. . . .'' He laughed. ''I seem like an old fool to be telling you all this. And truly my nightmares appear absurd to me now.''

Moira laughed a little bitterly. ''Something happened to me too when I was young. . . . But I am free. . . . I tore myself free from it.''

''I thought so,'' he said gently. ''There is a great difference in our ages, but if I may say so, we seem to have—well, had something alike to face in life. No, I do not mean just that—it's presumptuous. I have never, I think, before met any woman quite like you. Strength and the genius for insight, such as yours, rarely meet in the same body.''

A hungry intensity in his words escaped him unawares. Though he had spoken nothing of significance, the feeling that shook him reached her through the dusk with sinister force. She had felt the same thing before and had had a momentary impulse to run, to break free from it. She did not want to be subjected to another tyranny of her emotions. . . . Yet she had reasoned with herself. Here was a future that could in every sense be ideal, a man with whom she had everything in common and whom she knew she could trust. . . .

A moment later he changed the subject and she was glad.

''By the way,'' he said, ''why not have your guest stay over, if he will? You know I've extra

bedrooms, and there is no reason why he should not occupy one as long as he likes.''

It was a point that had worried and embarrassed her, and she was inexpressibly pleased that he had thought of it.

''You're too good,'' she said fervently, ''and I would love to keep him.''

They chatted on over impersonal shallows until the time came for her to return to the cottage.

XXV

As she left him that night she wondered if her conscience troubled her. She was certainly encouraging Osprey. Standing in her own sitting room, she recalled vividly how, when he took her hand in good night, she had felt the fierce stream that poured through him, and her very silence had given him permission to unburden himself. She was thankful for his restraint. Moreover her silence had been the result of pleasure, and not mere lack of words. How little she had known of anything quite so contained and yet so overpowering in Miles. . . . She could respond to that, she knew: she had only to yield a little and she could respond.

The thought of Osprey in this personal sense, of some one beside her husband in a personal sense, caused her to realize how much importance she had gone on attaching to Miles. How ridiculous and womanly of her! she reflected. Miles had taken his departure, and yet she had not until now seemed quite to believe in it. Perhaps even yet she did not believe in it. She had told Osprey that it was over; she kept repeating to herself that it was over. Everything pointed to it, Harlindew's own unequivocal statement and her angry

resentment of the manner of his desertion, particularly his letter. But in her real consciousness she had continued to expect his return . . . during the whole of her talk with Osprey, Miles had been present as a reality—a definite bar—in her thought.

But now a new thing happened to her. She suddenly faced her whole life spread out before her as on a single canvas, or rather as a continuing panorama—and not just one small segment of it. Miles had not been her whole life; he had been but a part. He might have continued to be that part indefinitely and still not become her whole life. She had been magnifying him until she had lost sight of the rest, all that other strange web of adventure and catastrophe which had included her birth, her childhood, her love for Hal, her tragic discovery, her runaway, her struggle to help herself. . . . That would go on, no matter what happened, whether Miles returned or stayed away, and it would go on according to her own terms.

The notion of herself as an entity, surviving, growing, separate and alone, filled her for the first time with a curious excitement. It released so many fresh and irresistible currents within her. She began to think more consciously of other men, of Potter Osprey in particular. She rose and went out into the orchard. The painter had had constructed a table and seats for them earlier in

the summer, and she sat down in one of the gaily painted stationary benches which gave the children so much pleasure. They recalled to her his scores of other attentions; the flowers and delicacies of one sort or another which he had sent down regularly by Nana, his numerous subterfuges to help her with money, the little comforts that he had added to the house, his presents to young Miles and Joanna. These things, of which her husband—most younger men indeed—would never have thought, were dear to her. And once he had hinted, in a joking manner, of "leaving her the cottage" in his will.

"You can't tell—I may be knocked off some day," he had said. "I've become such an absent-minded countryman that I'm always a little surprised to find myself alive after crossing a New York street."

She had turned such overtures off with pleasantries, which they deserved, and yet she had entertained them; they had wooed her and become a part of her dilatory dreaming. As she sat there in the caressingly cool night she felt this keenly; she felt a sense of permanency and peace under the protecting boughs of the orchard. She could not remember such a feeling since long ago at Thornhill.

She rose reluctantly and went into the house. Unquestionably she had reached a point where she could regard Osprey's passion without dis-

turbance; and yet she longed for a temporary refuge from it, knowing that at any moment they might be brought together by some turn of the conversation such as that to-night and his reserve would give way. She wanted to escape that contingency for a long time, to think out her relationship to the future. But she had no reasonable means or excuse to flee. Her plans had not been made for the winter, and according to their informal agreement she was to remain in the cottage another month.

Robert Blaydon's visit furnished a safe diversion for three days. She was able to keep him that long through the insistent hospitality of Osprey, and the fact that the two took a strong liking to each other. They sat up late together in the studio one night over a fine brand of Scotch whisky which Blaydon had brought with him, and the younger man submitted amiably to a questioning about Moira which disclosed little more than that he had been her boyhood companion at one time, and her circumstances had once been opulent. He told Osprey, however, that he had heard his own name often.

"Yes?" inquired his host. "Well, perhaps that's natural, as you say we have been fellow townsmen."

"Fact is," replied Blaydon, "I've an aunt out there who has become vastly interested in paint-

ers, in her old age, and I've heard her speak of you. A Mrs. Seymour."

"Don't ask me to remember names back home," laughed Osprey. "You would think me a pretty determined exile if I told you how long it had been since I was there."

"In any case, she'll be much excited when I tell her that I have met you," said the other, reflecting on the humour and difficulty of his situation, in which discretion constrained him with Osprey from telling Moira's connection to his aunt, and with his aunt from telling Moira's connection with Osprey.

"Mysteries are a damned nuisance among such likeable people," he concluded to himself. "I hope this one gets cleared up some day." And his conviction was that it would.

XXVI

Moira awoke late, long after Potter Osprey had departed for the city, where he was to meet Roget and return with him in the car some time that night.

It was her last week in the cottage. A few days after the departure of Rob Blaydon for the west, Elsie Jennings had paid her a visit and talked. Miles Harlindew was living with a young woman in the Village. There was a rumour of their going to Europe together. . . . Moira suppressed a twinge at this, in which at first there was more of sardonic humour than of pain. The pain came sharply afterward, but it did not remain long this time, and it left her at last aloof. She no longer felt the vestige of an obstacle to following her own inclinations, and she also had no further defence against Osprey's attentions.

The growth of understanding between them was almost wordless, monosyllabic. It made her intensely happy to discover in his eyes how much she was bringing to him. A long time would have to elapse before she could give a worthy response to that emotion, but she felt that it would come. . . .

The troublesome details of her future were therefore on this morning a matter of no concern

to her at all. What filled her with delight was the immediate present. Never had she seen such weather as that October day, or if she had, never before had she been alive to its innumerable aspects at once. After the dubiousness and suffering of the past few weeks she felt both older and younger, both cleansed by experience and ready for more to come. Her whole womanly being was gathering itself for something new, and she meant to grasp it to the full. The ship's engines were throbbing in her blood and the open sea lay beyond, but her hand was firm on the wheel. . . .

It was a day to idle, one of those days when the children were positively in the way and work impossible. It was a day of heady egoism, of reveling in her securely felt advantages, and a certain sense of having won the spurs of lawlessness. She would be restless until to-morrow when the men came. What fine friends they were!

It was eleven o'clock, and, following her usual custom, she walked down to the grey metal box in which both her own mail and that of the Osprey house was deposited. She half expected to hear from Rob Blaydon who had promised to write her from Thornhill.

She ran through the letters quickly. There were none for her, but she went back to look again at a large envelope addressed to Osprey. She supposed she had done this simply because it was larger than the others and extended out around

them while she held them in her hand. But there had been another reason, as she discovered on second examination. The handwriting was familiar. . . .

She realized in fact that she was looking at the handwriting of Mathilda Seymour. She could not have mistaken it, even with nothing else to guide her, but there was the postmark of her city. She turned the envelope over, only to find confirmation in the return address.

She caught herself almost in the gesture of tearing it open. Her first thought had been that it was her letter, no matter whom it was addressed to. But she stopped herself in time. She could not open Potter Osprey's letter. She wondered that she could have had the impulse to do so. Yet, as if she feared the temptation would be too strong, she kept repeating to herself, "I must not open it, I must not open it. . . ." The temptation passed and did not return, but her disturbance and her curiosity were more stubborn.

It was almost uncanny that Mathilda should be writing to Potter Osprey. . . .

But was it? Now she remembered he had told her the place of his birth—a mere conversational allusion, which she had passed over quickly, not wishing to discuss the city. It had surprised her mildly; then she had recalled in passing that years ago there had been some people named Osprey whom she never knew. Could Mathilda have

known them? Could she have known the painter, perhaps in his youth? It was unlikely; she had never mentioned the name in Moira's hearing.

There was nothing to be gained on that tack, and soon she was off on a more fruitful one. Rob Blaydon had told her about Mathilda's new hobbies, one of them helping young artists, another buying pictures for the city museum. She had drifted out of social life and interested herself in a little club, not very prosperous, where the artists of the city met.

Here was a possible even a probable, explanation. Osprey was a native painter, who had gained reputation elsewhere. He had been a struggling boy at home, and what could be more natural than that Mathilda should decide the city must be enriched by one of his works? Or if this was not exactly the case, there were a dozen other reasons why, on behalf of the club of which Rob had spoken, she might be communicating with him.

The reason was enough for Moira, or at least she made it suffice. She would find out the truth before long, and in any case it could not concern herself. For it was incredible to her that Rob, in the face of their definite understanding, had mentioned her at home. "At home!" How naturally she used the phrase. Well, there was much to be cleared up—both there and here. She troubled herself no more about the letter. She laid it with

the others on Osprey's table, took the children up to Nana to look after, and went off for a long walk. By ten o'clock that night she was in bed asleep.

. . . . . .

The two men drove up to the farm house, in accordance with their plan, at about two o'clock in the morning in Roget's car. They lingered in the hall and studio for a few moments and went upstairs, the painter taking his mail with him.

Some hours later the same sound woke not only Roget, but Moira, down in the cottage. It was a sharp report, and her first clear thought was that a passing automobile had back-fired, perhaps Emmet Roget's, just arriving. She sat up for a time listening and then prepared to sleep again. Some one knocked on the outside door.

It was the producer, looking ominous as he stood in the half darkness, in a long black dressing gown.

"Mrs. Harlindew, an accident has happened," he said gravely. "I think, perhaps, I had better ask you to step up to the house with me."

She went with him up the steep bank, thoroughly unnerved. His hold on her arm was firm and decidedly helpful on the rough path. They passed through the lower part of the house and upstairs without a word. She knew before she arrived what had happened and dared not ask the question on her lips.

Osprey lay on his bed dressed, with a small, old-fashioned revolver in his hand. He was not breathing. The round, bleeding wound was near one temple. On the table beside him lay a photograph of herself, face up, the face of a half-smiling girl of eighteen. Beside it was Mathilda's letter. Moira snatched the letter and read, at first rapidly, then very attentively and slowly. "My dear Mr. Osprey," it began:

You will not remember an old woman of your native city, but I used to meet your father at the Round Robin Club long ago and admired his wit and character. I was even introduced to you once, when you were a very little boy. You had been left there one night to be taken home. Since then, of course, I have followed, though at a distance, your progress in the world as an artist. But it is not merely to presume on this slender acquaintance that I write to you.

I have a strange story to tell. There has lived in this house for thirty years, ostensibly as a servant but in fact more a companion and friend to me, a woman named Ellen Sydney. She came to my house as Mrs. Ellen Williams and brought with her a baby daughter, whom she called Moira. I adopted this child and raised her and loved her as though she had been my own. She believed she was

my own until her nineteenth year, when she discovered the truth. She proved to be as high-spirited as she was adorable, for although her life here offered every advantage, and was, I know, one long unclouded happiness, she gave it up in a day on learning her true parentage. I can understand that spirit and yet I have suffered cruelly because of her act. She left without a word, effacing every trace of herself, and from that day to this I have never been able to find her, though I have made repeated efforts. I had little hope, it is true, of persuading her to return even if I did so, knowing her nature and her capacity to carry out her own decisions.

I am convinced she has spent a large part of her life in New York, for at first, certain communications came from her there. Furthermore she loved the study of art and could only have followed it to her taste in that city. She may still be there. For that reason I write, thinking it possible if you have not met her you will, and she will then have a friend who has good reason to protect her. I am sending the latest photograph I possess of her.

You will ask why I have never addressed you before. It is because I have always hesitated to ask Ellen the name of her child's father. Moira, herself, is in ignorance of it.

Only a month ago Ellen was persuaded, by the arguments I have used above, to tell her story to me in confidence, and now I write with her consent. To complete the coincidence, my nephew, Robert Blaydon, having met you, has given me your address.

You may be sure that should you ever meet with your daughter or be able to send us word of her, two lonely old women will be grateful.

I have considered that you may not be the kind of man who will care to receive this letter, but I do not believe that is possible. The passage of time softens our errors and may even turn them into blessings.

Yours very sincerely,

MATHILDA SEYMOUR.

Moira put down the letter and sank beside the bed. She threw her arms over the figure that lay there.

"But, father," she cried softly, "I could have loved you as my father, too. . . ."

The tall figure of Roget was standing beside her, with bent head, his penetrating glance, full of profound compassion, searching the face of his friend.

"Perhaps he could not, Mrs. Harlindew," he said, as if thinking aloud.

THE END

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